

**The 2024 Presidential Election: Continuity or Change**

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### **Abstract**

For many, one of the appeals of immigrating to the United States is its structural systems that make fruitful promises to its citizens. Capitalism and democracy are coveted by people around the world as they all want to experience the 'American Dream'. However, is this structure altered as leadership shifts throughout American history? Specifically, does the 2024 election and the 47th President Donald Trump change anything? This paper explores whether or not the political and economic status quo of the United States has been or will be altered. Every four years, as the president is shifted (depending on their term), how does the political and economic structure of the US change? Does it even change? Because the majority of Americans have been taught about the goods of American society, many are unfamiliar with the underlying shortcomings of the American government. When people think of America, they think of a prosperous country where every single person has a say in how things play out. However, corruption within the government, influences of the wealthy, and clashing political parties find ways to maintain the current state of America. Thus, this paper argues that regardless of who is the face of the United States, the political and economic status quo will remain unchanged, even if significant transitions seem inevitable.

### **The 2024 Presidential Election: Continuity or Change**

In 2024, many Americans waited eagerly for the outcome of the election, whether they were eagerly anticipating their chosen candidate to win or dreading the next four years to come, many awaited a new turning point in American history. Both parties believed that they had the better candidate; that their chosen candidate would greatly improve the country and that their choice was by far and away the most qualified and important for the position as President of the United States. Many people could not even fathom the idea that either a convicted felon in Donald Trump or a female person of color in Kamala Harris could be the face of our country and represent us as a people internationally. Trump and Harris, one of whom is currently representing our country, were backed by Charli xcx and the Brat Summer which took America by storm and one of the largest and fastest growing youth organizations in the country in Turning Point USA respectively. Each one of them had noticeably different policies and appealed to certain demographics that either swung the vote in their direction, or discouraged people from agreeing with them, which would ultimately have a great impact on everyday citizens of the United States, positively or negatively.

However, even though currently, America feels like it is going through an immense and extensive change through government shutdowns and intense immigration policies, in the long run, the political and economic status quo of the nation will not be significantly altered. Because Donald Trump remained triumphant in the 2024 election, Democrats and Republicans still remain at the forefront of American politics and dominate the political atmosphere as lesser-known parties are shunned with little support from the American masses. Consequently, corruption runs rampant throughout American policies as laws and policies are made to benefit those at the top of the political and economic hierarchy, keeping the elite powerful at the expense

of the people. The government will still have immense power over the citizens and the majority of the population, paving the way for the abuse of power as America's "democracy" continues to fade in favor of an oligarchic dynamic where power is consolidated within the top 0.001% of earners. America's economic policies, rooted in its deeply capitalistic sentiments will remain untouched. And even if there seem to be immediate effects of Donald Trump's presidency, for better or worse, our government systems will remain the same. Regardless of the person that is responsible for shaking foreign leaders' hands or building ballrooms in the president's sacred home, America's political and economic status quo and standing will remain, for the most part, unaffected.

### **The Political Status Quo: The Facade of Democracy in America**

According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the United States is classified as a representative democracy in which our government is elected by citizens who also vote for elected officials who represent the citizens' ideas and concerns within the government. In essence, the main purpose of a representative democracy is for citizens to be involved in the government without having to deal with the logistics of actually being in a government position. A person's impact is shown by being involved in voting for elected representatives that speak on their behalf to emulate the citizens' desires within a government. Nevertheless, ordinary citizens do not get the representation that they deserve within the government and do not have as much power as advertised, and the democracy that the United States prides itself in falls short of its intentions, a trend that has been apparent throughout United States history.

For the duration of United States history, various events have contradicted and challenged the nation's democratic ideals and institutions, with the government at the forefront

of these changes. In 1798, John Adams passed the Alien and Sedition Acts which made it illegal to criticize the government, increased the residency requirements by giving the President power to deport foreigners and ‘aliens’ considered dangerous to the interests of the United States.

During the Civil War (1861-1865), Abraham Lincoln issued executive orders to suspend the right of habeas corpus, seize newspapers critical of the government’s policies, and to conduct military trials of civilians. Furthermore, during World War I, Congress enacted the Espionage Act of 1917, which “included criminal punishments for anyone making false reports to help the enemy or anyone seeking to interfere with military operations or the draft” (Zampini, 2023), leading to the Sedition Act of 1918, which further punished mentioning or printing any “disloyal” language. The government had broad powers over its citizens and the authority to suppress any dissent, which was weaponized to target political opponents and restrict free speech, consolidating power within President Woodrow Wilson, his supporters, and the political elite.

Currently, Donald Trump saw record support from billionaires and as a result, placed people like Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and Mark Zuckerberg at the “front and center [of] his inauguration and has given Musk previously unimaginable power to dismantle and reshape the federal government through the Department of Government Efficiency” (Fung, 2025).

Billionaire tech executive, founder of Tesla, and widely considered the richest person in the world Elon Musk, spent at least \$250 million supporting Trump and his presidential campaign as a contributor in door-to-door canvassing groups. In return, Musk gained a coveted government position, contributing to the sustained oligarchy in America by concentrating immense power and influence into the hands of a billionaire, allowing himself to alter the government in his favor. Furthermore, he gained a position as head of the Department of Government Efficiency

(DOGE), which previously slashed his government programs and jobs while targeting agencies that investigated his companies. Now, his actions are able to end many, if not all of these investigations which will “not only boost Musk’s bottom line, but they will also make US workers less safe” (McNicholas & Poydock, 2025).

As a result, according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in July 2024, 72% of Americans no longer believe that democracy in the United States is a good example to follow and of the 72%, 8% say that it was never a good example to follow to begin with. Furthermore, as of May 2024, only 22% of Americans say that they trust the government in Washington to do what is right (Fetterolf, 2024). It is troubling to know that such a high percentage of Americans no longer believe in the democratic system that the United States prides itself in. When the people that make up a population doubt the current government and political system because policies passed by the executives contradict the average citizen’s interests, democracy has failed. In reality, people are dissatisfied with the current political system, as the United States moves farther and farther away from what was once considered the prevailing political system by many. The United States is not a democracy, and American citizens are finally coming to this conclusion. Power is consolidated within the billionaires that run the show, regardless of their experience in politics, where the political elite remain in positions of power at the expense of the average citizen.

### **Democrats, Republicans, and Their Political Duopoly**

In the United States, one of the most prominent aspects of the political spectrum is the prevalence of the two-party system. Since America was created after the Revolutionary War in 1783 and the formation of the United States government in 1789, Federalists and anti-Federalists competed for the election. Later, the two predominant parties were the Federalists and

Democratic-Republicans. Eventually, the Federalist party would be dismantled and in came two new parties: the Whigs and Democrats. When the issue of slavery became more prominent within the United States, Democrats and Republicans took control of the political spectrum and have remained as the frontrunners of American politics ever since (Pruitt, 2024).

However, throughout American politics, many different parties have tried to emerge as candidates for the presidency, the House, and the Senate. The populist party and the progressive party emerged as challenges to the two-party system in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively. Today, many third parties are emerging as potential candidates to challenge the prevailing two-party system. The Green Party emerged as a prominent party within the 2024 election cycle. Jill Stein, Green Party candidate, amassed over 600,000 votes throughout the United States, or 0.4% of the electorate. Jill Stein also received 0.9% of the votes in New Jersey (Arnold, 2024). Furthermore, by mid-2024, the Green Party had over 150 candidates who held elected positions in local governments nationwide, and registered Green Party candidates had won around 1,500 races since they were created in 1985 (Garcia, 2024). Third parties have been, for the most part, somewhat successful within the United States political system and have garnered significant activity and support from the masses. They are becoming ever more prominent as people start venturing beyond the political status quo.

Nevertheless, third parties within the current United States political system still are not viable as opposition and challenges to the two-party system have continued to be nonexistent. Though third parties certainly have a presence in politics, the two-party system creates a virtual political duopoly, where Democrats and Republicans are the only parties that have a chance at success where only the prevailing parties as faces of the two-party system are able to thrive. In the book *Spoiling for a Fight: Third Party Politics in America*, Sifry argues that third parties are

disadvantaged within the two-party system, as the face institutional barriers like ballot access rules, campaign finances, media marginalization, and debate commission rules that significantly deteriorate the influence that they have on the people. They lack the widespread reach that the Democratic and Republican parties have in the United States because they are deliberately handicapped (Sifry, 2003). Furthermore, Sifry argues that external and internal factors of legal structures, funding, party leadership, political trends, persisting organization, and lack of experience from internal debates cause third parties to fail within the current political system. Now, the question is whether voters truly have meaningful alternatives to the Democratic and Republican party, or whether people are stuck with choosing between the two. Every person that has beliefs that do not align with either of the predominant parties in the two-party system are not able to be represented in the government. The two parties do not accurately represent the beliefs of every United States citizen, and the chances that their beliefs are properly acted upon by the government remain very slim.

In fact, many Americans primarily believe that the 'blue' quadrant of the political compass is the only one that exists; they believe that Republicans are right-leaning while Democrats are left-leaning. Within a broader political scope, both Republicans and Democrats have similar views and are concentrated within the top right of the political compass (The Political Compass, 2024), where majority of the political perspectives that circulate around the world are ignored. The 'green', 'red', and 'purple' quadrants are completely ignored by the two-party system, where the 2024 election, and what seems to be every election in the near future, represent a limited scope of views that are incredibly underrepresented and disregarded in the American political spectrum. As a result, only Democratic and Republican views continue to prevail within the United States as Jill Stein of the Green Party and Chase Oliver of the

Libertarian Party were definitively outnumbered by the “conventional” views. The political status quo has consistently favored the Democrats and Republicans over all others in recent elections and ultimately prevents political diversity or any new ideologies from emerging. Consequently, the 2028 election, the 2032 election, the 2036 election, and many others after them will continue to support the two-party system, limiting political views within the United States and confining political diversity and other parties at the bottom of America’s political hierarchy.

### **The Economic Status Quo: Capitalism and Corporations Intertwined**

As the economic status quo and the political status quo of the United States have persisted, they have begun to intertwine and become one and the same in the form of government corruption. For centuries, government officials have taken advantage of their positions within the United States government and have contributed to the continuous distrust of the government, as wealthy elites act for their own benefit or others at the top of the economic hierarchy. Money and power act as motivation for people to continuously commit crimes to the detriment of the people, and corporations aligned with the government are able to siphon money and consolidate it within the corporate elite. In the 19th century, Boss Tweed, the political boss of Tammany Hall, controlled politics through corruption and patronage through receiving bribes and rigging elections. Even if they are not as extreme, many politicians followed suit, and used their positions of power to their advantage, circulating money within the political and economic elite (“Narrative: William ‘Boss’ Tweed,” n.d.).

In the Harris poll of 2025, 53% of Americans said that they believe that billionaires threaten American democracy, where over a third of Americans believe that the US economy is an uneven playing field that prioritizes the ultra-wealthy. Additionally, another 76% say that

billionaires benefit the most from a flawed system, where 35% believe that the economy is an unfair advantage to the wealthy (Roeloffs, 2025). Additionally, the wealthy are able to keep the money within the family from generation to generation. In the book *Dynasties: How Their Wealth and Power Threaten Democracy*; Phillips argues that wealthy families are becoming entrenched in “dynastization” by passing down wealth and influence across generations by setting up trusts and offices to manage wealth and boost long-term financial power and stability. Moreover, Phillips argues that political dynasties do the same thing by consolidating political power, resulting in an eroded democracy because of a concentration of wealth and power that opposes equal opportunity (Phillips, 2002). As a result, corruption becomes embedded within the structure of American politics; without corruption, our political and economic system would be vastly different. Wealthy families are able to leverage their long-term financial power to influence policies from their politician colleagues, secure their own political positions, and prevent reforms to the current economic system, preventing a shift away from corruption and allowing the same elite to dominate both the political and economic atmosphere. And when the wealthy families stay wealthy, ordinary citizens’ voices in this “democracy” are weakened, they have less economic flexibility, tax burdens are placed even more firmly on the masses, and more policies are created that prioritize the interests of the minority. When the democratic accountability of the government gets eroded, ordinary citizens face a system that is disproportionate and unrepresentative of their needs, creating further economic disparity between the rich and the poor.

The issue of corruption within those at the top of America’s hierarchy is not limited to wealthy families, however. According to Dave Johnson, members of Congress are able to surpass legal barriers by trading stocks using information that the average citizen may not have

access to, like unpublished data to sell before a stock price crashes. Johnson says that they also have access to Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), which they use for personal benefit. An Initial Public Offering is when a company chooses to sell its stock at a lower price so that people in Congress have the ability to buy them, right before the stock is released to the public at market prices. Those with early access to stock and buy it at the initial price gain immediate benefits because they pay lower prices than the rest of the public. Even though our country's economy is built upon principles of fair competition and equal access to opportunities, Congress members trade in favors to gain access to IPOs, creating an inherently unequal playing field for the majority (Johnson, 2011). A Congressional members' unique position to access information allows them to take advantage of the system to benefit themselves at the cost of others, and a natural desire for more wealth drives them to make such decisions.

Increasingly, the corruption of the government is not becoming limited to wealthy families, nor the legislative branch, the judicial system and an unchanging status quo incentivized the judicial branch to support the wealthy. The US Supreme Court has increasingly found ways to undermine democratic political power in favor of economic power as well as finding ways to suppress popular power. A US system based on checks and balances abusing their power is incredibly ironic, especially because those in the executive branch are responsible for appointing the people that serve in the judiciary. According to Xavier Flory, the Court tends to favor economic elites, its decisions intended to protect corporate power and limit the influence of ordinary citizens. Thus, when courts make major policy decisions or override democratic institutions, they weaken the ability for citizens to be accurately represented in the government (Flory, 2020). By ruling in favor of economic elites and shielding their interests from democratic

institutions, the courts act as a mechanism to preserve the existing social, political, and economic order in its current corrupt state.

### **Billionaires to Trillionaires, 5-Figure Salaries to Poverty**

One of the most notable constants in America's economic status quo is that the rich stay rich and are often prioritized over the general population. In the United States, "at the close of 2024, there were 813 billionaires with a combined total wealth of \$6.72 trillion. The total number of billionaires has remained constant [throughout 2024]" (Collins, 2025). The around 800 billionaires in the United States hold more wealth than half the nation and, as of 2024, according to USA Today, they hold 3.8% of the United States' total wealth while the bottom half of American families control only 2.5%. However, in 2017, Trump enacted immense tax cuts and delivered savings to the wealthy: the tax rate for the highest earners dropped from 39.6% to 37% (de Visé, 2024). In 2024, when Trump was reelected, he vowed to double down on these tax cuts. As a result, to this day, the 800 Americans that have enough money to potentially fix global hunger are growing ever closer to the 300 million Americans that struggle to pay their rent or their own lunches with respect to tax rates. Furthermore, Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, who sit at the very top of American wealth with a net worth of over \$400 billion and \$200 billion respectively, continuously gain wealth from their companies that have become necessary in American society. Tesla and Amazon have quickly become integrated within American society and supporting these companies only contributes to the increasing wealth inequality in the United States. In America, because capitalism drives competition and there are no limits to those who keep winning this competition, billionaires are able to accumulate an unfathomable amount of wealth and power over the general population, and we are powerless against it.

Conversely, if Kamala Harris was elected, she vowed to tax the “unrealized gains” of those worth over \$100 million at 25%. In theory, the tax increases would impact an estimated 10,000 Americans, the minority, yet it would target trillions of dollars and has the potential to raise hundreds of billions that could be put into social programs that benefit the lower class: affordable child care, housing, and paid family leave among the benefits (Asher-Schapiro & Baptista, 2024). However, even though this may seem beneficial to the lower class, Harris’ intense taxes on the wealthy may mess with the economy, as corporations and high-income individuals may be more reluctant to hire people, inadvertently creating less jobs while sustaining unemployment. Furthermore, in the grand scheme of the taxes, a small percentage increase may not be enough to disincentivize the predator-like nature of wealthy individuals or break them out of their corrupt habits. Such policies could be viewed as beneficial to the needy and detrimental to the rich. In reality, neither Trump’s nor Harris’s tax policies would do enough to move the needle away from people that are already wealthy, the people that are already powerful. Those that are wealthy have incredible influence over the masses and as people in positions of power, they decide where the money circulates and where it is allocated towards.

In the book *The Limits of Presidential Power*, Genovese argues that presidents are faced with structural limitations on their power that are rooted in a rigid systemic structure. Genovese argues that attempts to change the current capitalist system triggers economic punishments, making reforms that do not make the economy suffer difficult. Moreover, Genovese argues that presidents are also constrained by economic structures as capitalists attempt to help people make profits to allow for constant production while balancing social welfare programs to appeal to those that are not wealthy (Genovese, 2002). As a result, because presidents are confined into specific roles in a society, the rich are able to maintain economic leverage because they control

where money goes and how it is distributed. However, the poor, who rely on wages and public programs instead of investments, have no power to pressure the state into aiding them.

Additionally, when profits and capital of the state are threatened, the government will prioritize the protection of those with money and the ability to help it stay afloat. Conversely, social welfare programs are cut during financial hardships as wealth is accumulated at the top of the economic hierarchy. And when the government attempts to enact reforms, economic backlashes like inflation and unemployment increase economic inequality and disparity. The poor experience such economic downturns through job loss, debt, and high rent while the rich just wait out the period, disincentivizing presidents from attempting to reform the economic system. Hence, the American economic status quo remains unchanged not because change is impossible, but because change has the potential to increase the gap between wealthy and poor while worsening and reinforcing economic disparities.

### **Conclusion**

After Donald Trump was elected in 2024, people celebrated his inauguration while others were frightened at the thought of another four years of his reign. So far, his policies have had immense impacts on American citizens; deportations and border control, the largest government shutdown in American history, and substantial tariffs have been put into place that have significantly altered the political and economic landscape of the United States. However, the political and economic status quo of America will remain unchanged, as capitalism and an oligarchic America will persist. If Kamala Harris happened to win the 2024 election, even though the short-term outcomes would be vastly different, the political and economic status quo would also remain fixed.

America will continue to perpetuate its facade of being a “democracy” while contradicting itself through its actions. Ordinary citizens will continue to support or hate new policies that are created by the new office holders while government officials and the wealthy will continue to misrepresent citizens’ ideas. The two-party system will remain the dominant political party system of the near future as new parties come and go, unable to break through the structural barriers limiting their existence. A corrupt government system will persist as the rich remain rich and poor remain poor, where the three branches of government will work together to maintain their power and make profits as they abuse their positions of power. New policies will inevitably be enacted upon the citizens of the United States that allow wealth to accumulate and circulate within the minority at the top of the economic and political hierarchy, as wealthy individuals will continue to have immense power over the people.

Regardless of the winner of the 2024 election, the structure that America is so well known for will persist throughout the decades. And as people in power refuse to change the current political era because of its benefits to them, reforms will be nearly impossible to enact as a new, better system focused on equity that rids the government of corruption will be tossed to the side. Even though the White House may have a new shiny \$300 million ballroom, the White House’s structural changes do not align with the changes to the political or economic status quo, at least not yet.

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