

**The 2024 Election and the Status Quo**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the 2024 election being marketed as a choice between two radically different paths for a person leading the United States over the next four years and a change in America's status quo, the reality is that this is just an illusion. Voters were told each side would provide a different outcome depending on who they chose, so it seemed like a high-stakes decision intended to increase voter turnout. This research paper examines how the status quo does not change, no matter who you vote for in our two-party system, and how this happens. Additionally, it examines what each party (the Democrats and Republicans) says versus what they do and who ends up benefiting after a new President goes into the White House. Finally, we examine what the Trump campaign promised to focus on and what they delivered.

## The 2024 Election and the Status Quo

When the 2024 election results were released on November 5, 2024, America was split. One side believed this was the day Democracy died, and the other side put faith in Donald Trump to “Make America Great Again”. Many Americans were under the impression that a radical change in our country’s status quo was going to take place. When taking a closer look, we can see there really was no fundamental change in our government's system.

In America, the status quo politically can be considered an oligarchy and a capitalist economy (with a majority focus on oligarchic and corporate capitalism). A study conducted by Princeton University concluded that for the bottom 90% of wealth earners in America, no matter how much public support they give for a law to be passed in Congress, it has a 30% chance of being passed. However, for the top 10% of elites, the wealthy, and corporations, they receive their own line. It gives them a significantly greater voice in whether a law can be passed through our government. This is not a coincidence; it’s a strategic plan. Only around 0.05% of Americans will donate more than 10,000 dollars to politics, which makes politicians and representatives reliant on this small percentage of the country’s population. In order for a candidate to raise this money for their campaign, their donors have to benefit from something in return that will greatly help their businesses. This creates a corrupted system and a government that fails to represent a majority of the American citizens and only works for the mostly wealthy people of the population (RepresentUs, 2015).

A major reason why this is legal in our country is from the case, *United Citizens v. FEC*. In this case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that money is a form of speech and limiting the amount of money being spent by independent organizations conflicts with the First Amendment (Heimler's History, 2021). It was ruled that while donations directly to a candidate or party could

be limited, spending on third-party organizations could not be limited. This created a rise in Super PACs and organizations using dark money to fund our elections, as seen for the 2020 election and the 2024 election. The logic behind this was that if organizations aren't directly communicating with a party or candidate, there will be no corruption taking place. This creates a culture where the loudest voices become the richest voices. After this case, funding for elections skyrocketed. PBS (2025) explained that Super PACS raised more than 2 billion dollars in 2020 and spent half of it to leave more money for future elections. Additionally, 501(c)(4) groups (meant to be non-profit organizations that benefit society, but in politics, they are usually corporations) give massive amounts of money towards Super PACS as well, instead of donating directly to the candidate or party.

To understand the scale of how much more a billionaire donates than the average American, Roeloffs (2026) found that a billionaire donates, on average, 10 million dollars. This would be the total of 100,000 average Americans collectively donating. This is the reason why America has become an Oligarchy politically. The richest people have a concentrated amount of power over our government, and the politicians who were put in place to represent all Americans only represent and protect the wealthiest people.

### **The Political Compass and Reinforcing the Status Quo**

The Political Compass is a website that makes tests available to everyone. It's a graph to represent four areas of political ideologies. The vertical y-axis represents a person's social views, ranging from authoritarians near the top and libertarians near the bottom. The horizontal x-axis measures a person's economic policy views, ranging from left to right. There are 4 total quadrants, which include the authoritarian left, authoritarian right, libertarian left, and libertarian right (The Political Compass, n.d.).

Second Thought (2020) demonstrated that the political compass in America omits almost all of the left past the center line. Almost all of our politicians are seen in the first quadrant, and although this compass is not perfect, we start to see the broad trends exposing that our candidates will only reinforce the status quo. When we look at where Kamala Harris and Donald Trump are placed on the Political Compass, they both lie in the first quadrant, which represents the authoritarian right. While this does not show exactly how the candidates will run our country, it gives us a visual that both sides are two variations of the same system. The right represents that Kamala Harris and Donald Trump both support a capitalistic market and believe in using state authority to enforce laws and order. So, no matter what candidate you vote for, there will not be a radical change in ideologies or a change in the already established status quo.

When I took the Political Compass test, I ended up in the middle of the third quadrant, which represents the libertarian left. This represents the preference for personal freedom, as long as a person is not harming others (near the bottom of the y-axis), and the economic belief that our country should redistribute its resources. When I had my family and friends take the test, they also ended up in the third quadrant, but the only difference was that they were slightly closer to the middle of the graph. Additionally, Turning Point UK (2020) posted a video of Charlie Kirk taking the Political Compass test, for which his results were in the fourth quadrant, representing a libertarian right. I was incredibly surprised by this because I believed his views greatly aligned with President Trump's, since leading up to the 2024 Presidential Election, he was endorsing him all over his social media accounts.

The Political Compass test exposes a major problem by having both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump in the first quadrant. It does not represent a variety of ideologies and methods of running our country. Our system only functions to maintain a status quo with the illusion of

options between two candidates. Other voters who are in different quadrants are put in a situation during election season where they have to choose between “the lesser of two evils” or “who they hate less”.

### **The Democratic Party's Status Quo**

The Democratic Party characterizes itself as the group that prioritizes promoting equality for everyone, appreciating the middle class, making healthcare a human right, ending gun violence, ensuring women have the right to make decisions about their bodies, and that America should be the land of opportunity for everyone (Democratic Party, n.d.).

Regardless of what the Democratic Party advertises itself as, they still receive large amounts of dark money from Super PACS who are greatly benefit if elected to office. The Brennan Center for Justice (2025) found that 1.2 billion dollars was raised by dark money groups for Democrats alone to influence the 2024 election, while the Republican Party received 664 million dollars. It becomes evident that the party that promises to devote its priorities to the working class is, in reality, being influenced and bought out by its donors.

Carney (2014) did an analysis and found that billionaires and wealthy elites such as Tom Steyer, Elon Musk, and Warren Buffett are just a few people who have benefited greatly after investing money in the Democratic Party. In 2014, Steyer had been advocating for and investing in renewable energy initiatives. Then, he received a \$10 million subsidy for infrastructure in a Bay Area neighborhood. When his spokesperson was asked by the Washington Examiner what type of investments in renewable energy Steyer had, she could not answer the question. Elon Musk, the richest man in the world, has donated to both parties but profited during Obama’s presidential term. He was given tax cuts, loans, and subsidies for his electric car company, Tesla, and solar installation company. Finally, Warren Buffett, who was the second richest man in

America at the time, supported the estate tax, which Obama later passed. It becomes clear that while the Democratic Party uses rhetoric and advertising to appeal to working-class, everyday Americans and fights for progressive policies, the reality is that the party really prioritizes protecting investments and policies that benefit rich elites who fund their campaigns.

The 2024 election originally had former President Biden running against President Trump, just like in 2020. A big part of the Democratic Party's downfall was Biden's evident declining health and his reluctance to drop out of the race until very late in the season. When Vice President Kamala Harris jumped into the race, multiple flaws in her campaign did not appeal to as many voters. Many registered Democrats were found to have not voted at all in the election that year.

One of the biggest mistakes made by the Harris Campaign was its core message. During this time, many Americans were worried about inflation and the trajectory of the economy. Kamala Harris's campaign focused too much on having a joyful and optimistic vibe, but many working-class Americans felt forgotten, and that the Democratic Party was not listening to their concerns. In 2020, Joe Biden's campaign had a major focus on defeating Donald Trump, and the Harris campaign took this same approach. The problem with this was that Kamala Harris was not able to differentiate herself enough from Joe Biden, so it seemed like she would lead the country just as he did during his first term. In one of her interviews, she was asked what she would do differently from Biden (who was an unpopular president during this) if elected as President, to which she replied, "not a thing comes to mind." This created a problem where voters did not believe anything would change if they voted blue that year. A core demographic of the Democrats is the middle class and working-class Americans who are seeking opportunities and

equality. Since they did not feel seen or that anything in their stressful lives was going to change, it became a big downfall for voter turnout that year (The Democratic Party in Crisis, 2025).

### **The Republican Party's Status Quo**

The Republican Party has advocated for using common sense to solve problems, putting America first, ending inflation, securing the border, upholding justice, less government intervention to make life for the average American citizen more affordable, and tradition (Republican National Committee, n.d.).

Similar to the Democratic Party, Donald Trump from the Republican Party received over 450 million dollars from billionaire families. This was almost 3 times more than Kamala Harris received (143 million dollars from billionaires) (Americans for Tax Fairness, 2024). Shifting attention back to Elon Musk, he contributed over 291 million dollars to the 2024 election alone, along with Timothy Mellon, Miriam Adelson, Richard & Elizabeth Uihlein, Kenneth C. Griffin, and Jeffrey & Janine Yass, who all gave more than \$100 million each to the Republican Party for the election. As a result, it came with great perks for the donors. After Trump won, Elon Musk was given the top leadership position in the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which is aimed to identify then cut any federal spending seen as “wasteful”. When this happens, fewer taxes are needed because less spending is taking place by the government. This, in turn, translates into billionaires and wealthy elites needing to pay less in taxes. Essentially, Elon Musk was given “unprecedented access and power,” allowing him to dismantle agencies that regulate his corporations (Americans for Tax Fairness, 2025). As for Timothy Mellon, he was born into wealth, having \$14 billion dollars from his family, and frequently advocates for stopping American citizens from receiving “government freebies”. After supporting Trump's reelection by giving \$197 million dollars to the Republican party, cuts on Medicaid, food assistance, and

education funding were proposed, which aligned with his open resentment towards government services. The third highest donor for the Republican campaign was Miriam Adelson, who spent \$145 million dollars. She is a dual citizen in the U.S. and Israel and supports Trump protecting Israel (OpenSecrets, 2025). Despite what the Republican Party advertises to make America more affordable for the average citizen and uphold justice and dignity; they do the exact opposite. They cut essential services that American citizens need in order to survive so that billionaires and corporations can profit from tax cuts and lower regulations. The reality is that the slogan “America First” is really a “Donor First” and based on the trajectory of the exponential increase in spending for our elections, this won’t change anytime soon.

In the 2020 election, a big reason Donald Trump lost was that he handled the COVID-19 pandemic poorly and was divisive as a president in his first term. This put off voters, and many of them described him as “too aggressive” and not presidential. For example, he would tweet racist rhetoric and criticize America’s traditional values, and then, he would praise authoritarian administrations like Vladimir Putin (Bryant, 2020). Biden's campaign focused on bringing unity and stability back to America, which helped him win the 2020 election. But with a similar situation to the political campaigns, 63% voters expressed that they voted for Biden that year to vote against Trump rather than because they wanted Biden (Pew Research Center, 2020).

There was a big shift in Trump's 2020 election versus the 2024 election. Multiple reasons why were because he had a strong core message to address the economy, immigration, and crime. It was evident from polls that these issues were what really mattered to Americans, so during the campaign, they felt more seen by the Republican Party than the Democratic Party. Kamala Harris, on the other hand, did not have a strong, clear message that sparked enough conversation. If you asked an average voter to name a policy or topic that Kamala Harris was

focused on fixing, they probably would not have a good answer for it. Even if she looked better on paper or was more qualified than Donald Trump, people liked his vibe or vision because he made it sound simple and clear, even if he did not understand it all. As for advertising, the Republican Party was able to reach a wider audience through social media and podcasts (particularly right-wing podcasts). The second major problem in the campaign was that the sense of urgency was not felt by voters like in 2020. By this point, Trump had not been in office since 2020, so this impacted voter turnout who had originally supported the Democrats (David Pakman Show, 2025). Lastly, voters who were young men, black, and Hispanic all increased their votes towards Trump. In 2024, compared to 2020, Latinos' support for Trump through voting increased by 13%, and the black vote had a 5% increase. So even if Donald Trump had 34 felons, 1 conviction, and 2 impeachments, he was still voted the 47th President of the United States by the American people, which is considered to be one of the biggest comebacks in American history (Smith, 2024).

### **Trump 2.0: A Change for the Worse**

Even though the status quo has not changed despite being presented with the option of two parties, the Trump Administration has made our country worse in other ways that affect the lives of many Americans. While his campaign preached “Making America Affordable Again”, he has done almost the complete opposite. During the government shutdown, PBS (2025) reported that 42 million Americans were estimated to lose access to food stamps (SNAP benefits). The Trump Administration argued that they did not have enough funds to go towards giving benefits, but in reality, there were contingency funds in the SNAP account which may be able to fund a partial or near full amount as before. Instead, they refused to reimburse families, veterans, the elderly, low-income individuals, and more who simply did not have enough money

to put food on their tables. With a combination of cutting SNAP and with employees not receiving pay from the government shutdown, it had detrimental effects for vulnerable communities. During this time, I saw the effects of this decision in my community. When some of my classmates' parents or relatives were not getting paid for work, they did not have enough money to pay for food at all. As a result, there was an increase in families having to get in line for ingredients and a small bag of meals at our local food bank.

Food is not the only thing Americans have to focus on. Senator Patty Murray (2025) explained how the Trump Administration is actively attempting to abolish the Department of Education from the inside out, since legally they cannot do it themselves. To get around this, Donald Trump and Linda McMahon have fired *half* of the staff in the Department of Education in March so that they do not have the resources to ensure the offices can appropriately track progress of students, find ways to get better outcomes for students, producing the entire nations report card, enforcing civil right laws for students, making sure no student is denied access to a quality public education, and so much more. Even when representatives are fighting against this in the lower courts, it gets overturned by the Supreme Court since conservatives have a 6-3 majority of justices. This has resulted in multi-billion-dollar worth cuts to students, teachers, and schools that give resources, counseling, afterschool programs, and grants in order to advance education for students across the country. In total, 27 billion dollars has been cut by the Department of Education; their explanation for this is to improve efficiency.

Meanwhile, the money taken away from education for millions of students, food from vulnerable families, veterans, and the elderly is being allocated towards expanding our military, stricter borders and deportations, and putting money back into the pockets of the wealthy elites.

The One Big Beautiful Act gives over 170 billion dollars over the span of four years (29 billion dollars per year) towards border enforcement, arresting, finding, detaining, and deporting immigrants. This amount of money is more than is spent on police in all 50 states combined, and the amount of money going to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) this year is getting more funding than “eclipsing funding to agencies whose law enforcement missions involve pursuing terrorists, violent criminals, sex offenders, fentanyl and other drug traffickers, and gun traffickers” (O'Herron, 2025). Donald Trump advocated in his campaign that he wanted to get rid of illegals who are the “worst of the worst” because they are criminals, stealing jobs from Americans, and he wants to uphold the law (like justice). As of October 1, 2025, it was found that the people booked in ICE custody for 2025, 73% of them had *no* criminal conviction. This means that they have a civil conviction, such as overstaying their visa or just existing in the country without a valid status. Of all the people in ICE detention centers with criminal conviction, only 5% of them are from violent crimes. The rest of them include Vice convictions (3%, which includes gambling, prostitution, alcohol, and drugs, but are considered victimless), immigration (5% illegal entry and document fraud), traffic (vehicle law breaking), and 4% is other. It becomes clear that the Trump Administration is not going after the highly dangerous immigrants, yet has cut so many benefits for vulnerable communities, destroying education for students all over the country, and on top of all this, spends more money to detain and arrest immigrants who have not committed serious crimes than on criminals who commit some of the most horrific acts imaginable. This is the opposite of efficiency and common sense to what the Republican Party preaches and stands for (Cato Institute, 2025).

The next big thing the money goes towards is back to the same rich elites who donated to the Republican party to win the 2024 election. Davis (2025) found that over the next 10 years,

the top 1% of wealth owners in America will receive a total of 1 trillion dollars in tax cuts. The amount of money that Medicaid is being funded by the federal government for in the next 10 years is \$930 billion dollars. Currently, Medicaid helps cover over 80 million Americans needing assistance or who are low-income, and this essential program to ensure the health and safety of Americans is being cut to give already ultrawealthy people more money and benefits.

Finally, the Trump Administration has reallocated the funds used for essential services that provide for average Americans towards expanding the U.S. military. The previous name of our military being Department of Defense was renamed to the Department of War, indicating a shift from being diplomatic to being on the offensive in a way.

The Trump administration has requested a 44% increase in spending towards the Department of War, which is 1.5 trillion dollars. These funds will go towards an increase in salary for military workers, creating the “Golden Dome” (which is a space-based missile defense system said to “keep Americans safe”), making battle ships and non-battleships, and improving combat medical readiness (The White House, n.d.). The need for a funding increase in the Department of War was a result of the initiation of the war along with Israel against Iran on February 28, 2026, killing their Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 2026). President Trump said the reason for this was necessary to destroy any “imminent threats”. The problem with this explanation is that it makes no sense since in June of 2025, the U.S. targeted Iran's nuclear facilities (USA TODAY, 2026). While there are many debates about whether this was a necessary attack, the lack of evidence sparks questions about whether putting a trillion and a half dollars into the military was a necessary step/action to take.

## Conclusion

Even though the 2024 election was advertised to change the trajectory of our country based on two candidates, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, the outcome of the status quo of our oligarchy and capitalism remains the same. The Republican and Democratic parties proposed to use different methods in running our country if elected to create change for the betterment of the American people, but the "Business as usual" model is designed to serve the wealthiest people who donate to candidates for their campaigns. So, no matter if a citizen voted to continue with policies from the Democratic party or change to the Republican party policies, 90% of the population will continue to be unheard and underrepresented. Ultimately, the 2024 election was an illustration that our political system is an election between two sides to the same butt (Kropf, 2026). This unfortunate truth leaves a majority of Americans population with no power and defeats the purpose of creating a government that is by the people and for the people.

Lastly, while the Trump Administration has not changed our status quo or foundation of today's government, it has enacted policies and cut programs that are crucial to the survival and advancement of vulnerable communities, such as groups who need education, healthcare, and food to expand the new Department of War and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. This shift from social welfare to military enforcement highlights the changing priorities of the ruling class. His promise to make America affordable for the average citizen was nothing more than a charade to win votes, which could change the trajectory of the lives of so many Americans.

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