

## **The 2024 Elections and the Status Quo**

Elizabeth Elder

Department of Political Science, Diablo Valley College

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Professor John Kropf

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### **Abstract**

This paper looks at the 2024 U.S. presidential election and argues that the status quo stayed the same, no matter who won or would have won. The paper will show that elections only demonstrate change on the surface, but in reality, nothing major changes. Instead, institutions and donors are the ones who influence the power behind the scenes. Both parties, the Democrats and Republicans, are run by the donors and corporations. Policy change cannot happen within any administration as long as the same people are running it. Because money and corporations run the system, public trust continues to fall, and people no longer feel motivated to participate. The results of the 2024 election did not make much of a difference. The democratic process, as it is now, is meant to keep wealthy, powerful corporations as the leaders of our nation, and this current power structure is the status quo.

## **The 2024 Elections and the Status Quo**

The 2024 presidential election between Trump and Harris further divided a country that was already divided. People were clearly pushed into two sides. Each side believed that its own party would restore the country, while the other side would cause its fall. The media played a big part in convincing people that this race would decide the country's survival. All of this made people distrust the government even more than they already did. The American people's belief that a presidential election changes the shape of our future is embedded in American core values. However, the 2024 election showed that elections are limited when wealthy donors, corporations, and institutions are the ones running the system.

These presidential candidates campaign on promises of change in the form of progress and reform to the problems we face, whatever they might be. With the new leadership, the voters believe that there will be new power. This raises the question: Do elections actually change who holds power, or do all the systems just remain the same? On the surface, it appears we have a new leader. It, therefore, should have systematic changes in place, but as we go deeper, we realize it is the same structure as before, and these politicians were just feeding us the same rhetoric we have heard before. Therefore, elections create an appearance of change. However, unfortunately, it is just political theatre that keeps the public quiet and willing to put up with all the problems we face in government. We continue to hope that this time, with this new presidency, we will have a change, but that change never comes.

It is important to first define and understand what the status quo is. The status quo refers to how the United States' power structure currently operates and has always operated. Knowing what the status quo means gives us an understanding of how our government is being run. Our status quo is due to wealthy elites and corporations that limit our policies, our change, and any

direction that could help society. The status quo only suits those in the top tier of our society, and since money shapes our government, our future laws and policies will always be limited.

Knowing this helps to understand that it does not matter which party is currently in power.

Across every administration, the same issues have existed: rising healthcare costs, unaffordable housing, stagnant wages, growing income inequality, corporate tax breaks, homelessness, endless wars, unwavering support for Israel, sanctions on other countries, and the list goes on. So why would we expect any of these issues to change, no matter who wins the election? This is a pattern that existed long before the 2024 election, and now after the 2024 election.

Although the 2024 election between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris was portrayed as a major shift for the country, the political and economic climate remains unchanged. Elections do not result in any major changes and are just a tool used to calm the public. As a result, the real power in this country remains with the wealthy elite, large corporations, and systems that keep everything the same. There was change, but most of it revolves around the public's attention to certain issues, and as a result, these institutions spend most of their time keeping our country unchanged. The higher institutions, such as those corporations that control the media and AI, are a monopoly that our Democratic or Republican parties cannot undo. They are the ones who pay for the candidates and their campaigns. They are the ones who control the money, and those who control the money own the government and the people who work for the government. This is clearly proven when Larry Fink, the billionaire CEO of BlackRock, said out of his own mouth that it "really doesn't matter" who wins the Trump and Harris presidency, because both would be good for Wall Street (Norton, 2024). When we hear a billionaire CEO of one of the strongest and largest asset management companies say this, it confirms exactly what this paper is arguing. This paper will explain how the 2024 elections, no matter who would have been elected, would not

have brought any significant changes, because our political system is set up to protect the wealthy elites and corporations in control. In this paper, sections will be introduced to show how money, the two-party system, foreign policy, media control, and voting all work together to keep the same powerful people in charge.

### **Textbook Perspective on American Elections (Heineman)**

Understanding how the political system in the United States works will help explain why elections are useless and do not amount to any change. People with wealth have power, and those with power can control the politicians and, therefore, political power, and so the country becomes more connected to wealth (Heineman et al., 1995). Ferguson (2020) says that the United States has become an “affluent authoritarianism,” meaning the top 10 percent of income earners and the wealthy donors are those who shape policy outcomes. Data from Gilens and Page (2014) shows that out of 1,779 policy cases; average citizens have little to no influence on policy at all. This shows that, even though we are supposed to live in a democracy, the results show us that we are actually controlled by a small, wealthy group.

The same goes for the influence of corporations on our political system. Politicians in the United States depend on major funding during their campaigns, so they are easily controlled by the wealthy and corporations that fund them. In fact, it is not just during the campaign; just reaching the point of being able to run is influenced by finances. If strong financials are not present, it is unlikely the public will even hear about certain candidates, regardless of their resumes or other excellent qualities. Especially in recent years, the cost of campaigns has exploded, and therefore, these donors are gaining even more influence.

OpenSecrets, a research group that tracks and publishes data on money spent in politics, has found that the 2024 federal election was the most expensive to date, reaching \$15.9 billion,

and that large super PACs donated \$2.6 billion (OpenSecrets, 2024). On top of that, outside spending for the entire election cycle was projected to exceed \$5 billion, more than in previous cycles (OpenSecrets, 2024). This data shows that money and those who are donating it is who is really behind the elections. The data also shows a pattern of outside money in these elections constantly growing, proving that the wealthy are only getting richer and more powerful.

There are many examples of this, and one very strong one is the donations of Miriam Adelson, an Israeli American billionaire. Adelson has spent more than \$100 million to help Trump win the 2024 election and has given over \$600 million to support all three of his presidential campaigns, as well as other Republican candidates, since 2015 (Al Jazeera, 2025). So if one person is permitted to spend so much, they can basically own the person they are spending it on. If our system is so broken that a few people and corporations can own our candidates, senators, and presidents, then how can we ever get to any real change? Therefore, it is likely that, no matter who runs in elections, the result will be a candidate from the same couple of groups. This results in candidates who focus on the interests of the wealthy, funding them, and ignoring the public's interests. As long as this system is in place, elections are generally not going to make much of a difference.

For this reason, it is important to talk about elections and the limits they have because of this wealth-first system. While elections do change leaders, the system that is in place will determine how the government operates and what policies will remain or change. Some of the rules in place, especially those that have been around for a long time, serve to limit the courts and legislation, protecting those who are truly in power (Heineman et al., 1995). The gradual change in reforming laws is actually preferred by these institutions to prevent real change. Therefore, in the long term, it might be better to adjust the system, but that will never be

rewarded. What will be rewarded is stability and the prevention of any disruption that threatens the current power structure.

### **The Political Compass and Contemporary Politics**

The Political Compass is an online political analysis tool that uses a two-axis chart, an economic axis (left vs. right) and a social axis (authoritarian vs. libertarian), to show where candidates and politicians actually stand (Political Compass, 2024). It helps show how the U.S. political system limits the choices voters are given. The Political Compass tells us that U.S. elections are “never the broad clashes of ideologies that most other Western democracies are used to,” meaning the candidates we keep getting have the same policies and core values as the ones before them, and do not bring real change to our democracy or future (Political Compass, 2024).

When we look at the 2024 election through this lens, the pattern is even clearer. Although the media emphasizes the differences between Trump and Harris, both major candidates fall in the authoritarian-right quadrant, meaning that they are much closer in ideology than they appear (Political Compass, 2024). Third parties like the Green Party fall in the libertarian-left quadrant but are excluded from mainstream political discussion and participation. This shows that the choices given to voters are limited from the start, and that the candidates we get cannot really do anything outside the system in order to make any significant changes.

So, the system does not change, and elections are just put on as a show for the public. The narrative we are told convinces voters that a new leader will fix our problems and make the country better, but the truth is that both major candidates come from the same political background. This is exactly why no real change happens, no matter who wins.

## **Traditional Interpretations and the Two-Party System**

Now, to explain the two major parties that represented the 2024 election, the Democrats and the Republicans. The two major parties presented very different views for the election, and it is worth looking at how each one explained its position.

The Democratic/liberal party viewed the 2024 election as a critical election to win because they believed Donald Trump threatened democracy. Even though some understood that the Democratic Party had its flaws, it was crucial for them to beat Trump. Tim Koechlin, an author for Common Dreams, said, “Kamala Harris is not a perfect candidate. The Democratic Party is deeply flawed and limited. And inequalities are deeply rooted in our institutions. But we have to beat Trump” (Koechlin, 2024). So the Democratic view was that Trump was a threat to their democracy, and they needed to win the 2024 election.

Now we have the Republican conservative view, which wanted to win the 2024 election because they thought it was important to their economy, and they rejected the Biden administration. Conservative economists E.J. Antoni and Peter St. Onge, writing for The Heritage Foundation, argued that under Biden, “real earnings have plummeted as prices outpace wages,” with inflation-adjusted weekly earnings dropping about 5% during his term. They also pointed out that 83% of voters said the economy was “very important” in deciding their 2024 vote (Antoni & St. Onge, 2023). So, from the Republican viewpoint, it was about taking America away from the suffering Biden had caused to the American economy. Both the Republican and Democratic Parties did have strong differences in the way they ran things, but both parties are still running things under the same power.

Another important point concerns the two-party system. Most of our candidates who have the potential to be elected must be either Democrats or Republicans, which makes it harder to

pay real attention to other political views (Heineman et al., 1995). The foundation of our democracy is built on this system in order to prevent any other group from threatening the system that is in place. Research describes the U.S. system as a “two-party duopoly” that sets rules governing funding, ballot access, and media coverage, and these rules further complicate the chances of other candidates competing with them (Sifry, 2003).

These laws that affect our ballot are very beneficial to Democrats and Republicans because the media tends to focus only on candidates from those two parties, which prevents us from hearing about our other options. The main media outlets at this point have directed the public's attention towards the candidates that they feel have a winning chance. But not only does the media tell us who has the highest chance of winning, but they also keep the public restricted from knowing the other options people have, because the media itself is restricted. This goes back to understanding that the media is also run by a few elite corporations that tell us what information we can know and present that information in a manner that is beneficial to them. Therefore, the coverage in the media is biased and keeps the two main parties as the only real choices. Because of this, other candidates from third parties will easily be left out of the debate and miss the opportunities to gain public attention.

Jill Stein, a Green Party candidate, was on the ballot in most states. However, she had very little TV coverage, suggesting that candidates not affiliated with the Democrats or Republicans are pushed aside. Stein was running for the third time as a Green Party nominee and gained a lot of support from Arab Americans and Muslims during the Gaza war. Cornel West, a professor and independent candidate, also ran in 2024 and was a strong critic of Biden's Israel policy. He and Stein faced many challenges from the Democratic Party trying to remove them from the ballot in different states (Alter, 2024). So when the public watches these debates, they

are looking at two candidates who are both being backed by the same powerful people. In some cases, people do realize what is happening and end up voting for the candidate who is basically the lesser of two evils, because these are the only options given to us.

The differences between these two candidates are never much because the same corrupt system has controlled them, so the final election of who becomes president does not matter to them. The policies of these two groups are just surface level differences because the core values remain very much the same. So yes, voters still end up voting, but they are not voting because this is who they truly support. These are the options that are given to them, so people vote either 1 or 2 and are made to think they are the ones deciding who leads them. This can and does make everything feel very pointless and frustrating.

Now, when the country or media portrays us as being busy dealing with elections, the real problems get ignored. The whole system is just set up to protect the wealthy and institutions, no matter who the public picks as head of state. Issues that should be addressed, like healthcare, wages, and housing, are ignored, and the focus is solely on politicians winning the election. When issues that need to be addressed arise, they are often dismissed or given surface level changes to the problem or are not important to address. So, in turn, the public realizes that no matter whom they vote for or who wins, the same issues will persist.

This is exactly why we see the same policies no matter who is in office. We see a presidential change every 4 to 8 years, but with that change, we hardly see any real policy change. Instead, we tend to see policy continuity. Our economic systems, protection of corporate interests, prioritization of foreign policy, government spending, and military spending remain the same no matter what type of president comes into office (Heineman et al., 1995). At the same time, economic inequality continues to grow, which suggests that although leadership changes,

there is no actual change of power. Therefore, party change does not necessarily equal power change.

### **Evidence of the Status Quo**

After many years of presidential elections and different presidents, it has become clear that nothing will change. Our system was designed to protect the wealthy, and it still has not changed (Ferguson, 2020). The weaknesses in our government highlight the strength it has towards the wealthy and the very visible division the nation has between its wealthy class and the rest of society. This division has been harder to ignore and, in recent years, has become very apparent to the public. Now, especially with social media, the public does not rely on news outlets anymore, and people are more aware of corruption than ever before. This can be confirmed with new research showing that public trust in government has declined to some of the lowest levels in decades, with “just 17% of Americans” saying they trust the government to do what is right (Pew Research Center, 2025). If just 17% of Americans are left who trust the government, that says the distrust is not coming from one party, but across all parties, as it is the lowest level recorded in decades.

In response to this growing distrust, the wealthy and the institutions in control are working harder to keep things the way they are by spending more and taking over more corporations that can control the narrative. An example of this is the recent merger between Paramount Skydance and Warner Bros. Discovery. According to Al Jazeera, the merger would combine two of the largest news organizations, CBS and CNN, under one company (Hirschfeld, 2026). Another merger would combine Tegna and Nexstar under one company that would reach 80% of TV households in major U.S. markets (Hirschfeld, 2026). Paramount Skydance is led by David Ellison, “a key ally of US President Donald Trump,” and Ellison has reportedly promised

Trump “sweeping changes” at CNN if the deal goes through (Hirschfeld, 2026). Basically, Americans would watch national news owned by one or so corporations and their local news owned by another couple of corporations. After looking at all of this, the pattern is clear. The status quo is still here, but it has not just stayed the same. It has actually changed for the worse, with more control from the wealthy and corporations.

### **Israel/Palestine and U.S. Foreign Affairs**

A good example is seen on college campuses, where students protested in 2024 by setting up encampments on most major campuses nationwide and around the world. According to NPR, the Israel-Hamas war prompted some of the most volatile campus protests in decades, with hundreds arrested at encampments across the country (Smith, 2024). These protests showed widespread disagreement with the government’s support for the conflict in Gaza. At the time, Kamala Harris was running for president. She refused to side with the majority of her supporters in taking a stance against major pro-Israel lobbying groups like American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Even though polling shows that Americans are divided and, in many cases, critical of Israel’s conduct in the Gaza war, many members of the House of Representatives and Senate did not take a stance against Israel (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Going back to our earlier example of Miriam Adelson, here we see how she has been shaping foreign policy. As an American Israeli billionaire, her interests are with Israel. Her donations to Trump’s campaigns gave her the power to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2017 and to gain Israeli control of the Golan Heights during Trump’s first term. Trump himself has said the Adelsons “had more trips to the White House than anybody else,” referring to Miriam and her late husband (Al Jazeera, 2025). These changes came directly from one single wealthy donor and helped shape U.S. foreign policies. This was all done through the

advantage of being wealthy. Al Jazeera points out that when it comes to U.S. policy on Israel and the Palestinians, public opinion matters, but money and the influence it buys in politics matter just as much (Al Jazeera, 2021). Reports show that the United States has used its UN Security Council veto power 93 times, often to protect Israel from Security Council decisions (CFR, 2025). According to a report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a foreign policy research organization, the U.S. has focused on the peace process rather than protecting rights, which has reduced accountability for Israel (Hassan et al., 2021).

This all goes back to something important: the power of lobbying groups and financial funding over public opinion, showing that even when public opinion is in disagreement, the outcome remains the same. The example of Miriam Adelson is proof of this. Her donations led to direct and effective policy changes, even though millions protested against the war in Gaza and got nothing but arrested or fired. Power is held among the elites, who ultimately control decisions. This pattern shows that the system will remain the same, even when people demand change.

### **U.S. Plutocracy and Media Freedom**

Presidents and politicians over the past decade seem to be much more open about what they really want. It seems like there has not been much effort for them to hide their intentions regarding their priorities. It is not like the past was so different. People in government have always been motivated by money, but now they are more open about it, and the public seems to accept it. For example, there are pictures and a recording of a meeting where President Donald Trump was standing next to a crowd of billionaires he had personally invited. He did not have to put them right next to him for everyone to see, but he did because they influenced him, probably more like control. We can see that there is clearly an obvious connection between financial

influence and political power. We also see this in the media outlets, just like we see it in the presidential office. Another example is Jeff Bezos buying the Washington Post, because he wanted to control the information that came out of it, and he was able to just buy it. This aligns with research indicating that media systems are often influenced by political and economic power rather than being fully independent (Sifry & Watzman, 2006).

Another threat to our democracy has been the threat to some of our outlets for free speech. Recently, there has been a lot of pressure on our press. One example of this is the recent attempts to cut funding for public media companies like NPR and PBS primarily because they provide platforms for people who criticize certain political leaders (ACLU, 2024). Also, in some cases, journalists face hostility because when they speak out against those in power, they are labeled unpatriotic or even dangerous. As a result, people who might face backlash for their opinions will be less likely to express it.

Another attack on press freedom occurs when the media itself feels targeted. An example of this was a recent Pentagon policy requiring approval of certain information before it could be released to the public. Eventually, this led to legal issues and raised concerns about what the government will allow the public to know and not know. In one legal document, U.S. District Court Judge Paul L. Friedman wrote that “[t]hose who drafted the First Amendment believed that the nation’s security requires a free press and an informed people and that such security is endangered by governmental suppression of political speech” (NPR, 2026).

That is not the end of it. On top of all of this, the press keeps being attacked by politicians in power. For example, Donald Trump himself, when a journalist or a media outlet reports on something he does not like or that is not in his favor, will call it “fake news.” The term “fake news” has been coined to hurt journalism and make it seem inaccurate, so people can find it hard

to follow or be confused by it. As a result, this has made it hard for journalists to do their jobs when their work is so easily criticized by politicians and those in power and labeled as fake. It also makes it harder for people to access accurate information, especially when it is labeled as propaganda by politicians and leaders. This has led to a continued decline in the trust of the media. Leaders should be held accountable, but instead, they are the ones attacking the media and weakening our own system.

### **Voting**

Another way of preventing our systems from being changed is through the voting process. An example of this is when Trump tried to stop mail-in voting and push to require in-person voting and stricter ID rules. If this had happened, it might have created more barriers and affected many future elections. His excuse for doing this was to prevent undocumented immigrants from tainting our voting system, but what it may have really done was make it harder for groups like women, Black and Brown communities, and people with disabilities to vote. Previous studies show that voting laws like this one impact these groups the most (Brennan Center for Justice, 2024).

On top of that, our voting system is still determined by the Electoral College, which, when it was developed hundreds of years ago, was intended only for temporary use. Documents like the Constitution, written during a different period of American history, should not be treated as perfect and definitely should not be above questioning. Other ways we limit voting include reducing voting hours and gerrymandering, which is the changing of district lines to favor one political party over another (Heineman et al., 1995). Gerrymandering has been used for a long time to keep certain groups in power. Voters will be discouraged from voting because the system

is unfair, and this, over time, will reinforce the belief that elections do not lead to change.

### **Critical Interpretations**

The inability of elections to change systems of power begins with the illusion of change, where elections are made for the public to believe that real change is coming. During the election process, each candidate tries to sell the public on these promises of reform. The messages politicians deliver emphasize their differences, and the media does its part to highlight them, thereby increasing conflict.

However, it is not a real change that these new leaders will bring about, but just an appearance of change to give the public a sense of hope and relief. This argument is supported by claims that elections can create a sense of political control for the public, even when the underlying structures of power remain unchanged (Urie, 2018). This idea shows that what appears to be changed is often just an illusion, which supports Urie's argument. Clearly, we are limited from actually having change because the system itself is limited, and so the appearance of a transformation is what we see, but no real change. If elections are taking place in a broken, manipulative system, then changing anything might be too hard. Any upcoming new leaders will have to work with this restrictive system until a change is made.

David Schultz, a political science professor at Hamline University, has his own critical view of the system and its governance. He argues clearly that "The United States is not a democracy. It is a plutocracy". Plutocracy means a government controlled by a small group of wealthy, and his analysis is backed by data. The bottom 50% of American wage earners hold only about 2.5% of all wealth in the country, while the richest thirty Americans hold the same amount of wealth as that entire bottom half. The five wealthiest Americans alone, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Larry Ellison, and Larry Page, are worth over \$1.25 trillion

combined. Schultz also argues that this is not something that we only saw in the Trump administration. For at least forty years, wealth in America has been pulled toward a small group at the top, and “What the Trump administration is finally stripping bare is the mirage that the US is a democracy” (Schultz, 2025).

Urie and Schultz show that even though it appears we have a new leader who promises to make changes, these changes are just surface level. The system will not get fixed and remains the same because the power structures of our system are too deeply embedded. Furthermore, leadership changes have very little effect on how the system operates because they face the same challenges and restrictions of the system as those before them. Even if they intend to make real change, they realize their limitations once they are in office.

### **Conclusion**

Elections are used to give the appearance of change, but they do very little to change the system, even after the results are finalized and we have a new leader. The power structure remains the same: it remains with the wealthy and large institutions that influence which direction we are led. Because we are limited to a two-party system, we do not really have any meaningful choices. Power remains in a small group, and although voters choose different leaders, the system they operate within will remain the same. Even though elections give us that brief feeling of change, it is surface-level and not real. This illusion comforts people because it makes us feel we are making progress, even though the underlying issues remain the same, if not worse. When people vote, they feel they are participating and improving society, even though little actually changes. As a result, people continue to trust the process, which helps protect the current system by creating the belief that change is underway.

As a result, the system stays the way it is, gets harder to change, and nothing will really

change. Over time, public trust falls, and it feels pointless to participate if we end up with the same results. If this becomes the new norm, the entire democratic process starts to go down because trust in our institutions declines. Once the public gets used to the way things are, it becomes harder to challenge the system. Over time, people either stop paying attention or go through the motions, accepting that nothing will be different.

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