

The 2024 Presidential Election: Continuity or Change

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Abstract

Every four years, Americans are presented with what seems like two radically opposing choices between the Democrat and Republican candidate. As political campaigns have devolved from respectful debates to uncivil feuds, it feels like citizens have no in between- but despite their vote for either side of the “extreme” spectrum, it seems like no issue actually gets solved. The status quo remains the same, and although there are a lot of promises made by politicians during election season, they rarely come to fruition. This paper will cover the main issues that liberals and conservatives disagree on, demonstrating how the two separate administrations deal with issues like climate change and the wealth disparity. The paper will also examine the political compass, third parties, and critical viewpoints to gain a holistic viewpoint of what the status quo is and whether it will change. By comparing Trump and Biden’s policies and actions in office, it is clear that the status quo does not change between opposite parties- but that does not mean that nothing changes at all. Although the structure of our government and economic system will not be altered by different administrations, there is a clear increase in executive power under President Trump, meaning that things are changing for the worse as we lose the balance of power.

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In June of 2024, the debate for the presidential election occurred between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. The nation had been incredibly polarized, with Biden and Trump representing the two seemingly separate worldviews- but it became clear that neither were prepared to debate on the national stage. At one point, Biden even stated that “[he] really [didn’t] know what [Trump] said at the end of that sentence, and I don’t think he did, either” (Greenfield, 2024, para. 1). With Biden being unable to come up with simple coherent arguments, and Trump stating incorrect evidence (saying that every constitutional scholar wanted to end Roe v. Wade), many voters realized that they would have to vote for the lesser of two evils.

No matter who ends up in office, the status quo of the US government will remain the same: we will continue to exist in a capitalist economic structure and will continue to move toward being a plutocracy. Despite the supposed differences that Republicans and Democrats have, every decision (no matter whether the president is Biden or Trump) is made with the interests of massive corporations and billionaires in mind, the common citizen simply an afterthought. Candidates are unable to even run successful campaigns without the funding of a political action committee, and our legislative branch is being lobbied by corporations who only care about lining their own pockets.

What are the Two-Party System and Capitalism?

The United States has not always had two parties- in fact, many of our founding fathers like Alexander Hamilton and James Moore were strictly against any form of political parties. They worried that parties had “special interests to gain control of the government for their own selfish goals” (Heineman, 1995, p. 91). Over time, however, parties developed largely because our nation does not have a proportional democracy. With the Electoral College system, if a

candidate receives a majority in a certain state all the electoral votes go to that candidate. A president can be elected even when the majority of the population of the country did not vote for them. We have already seen this in 2016; the first time Donald Trump was elected. Although he won the electoral vote, three million more Americans voted for Hilary Clinton (Krieg, 2016). In the status quo, the United States has two main parties: the Democratic party and the Republican party. One political analyst outlines how the separate parties identify themselves. The Democrats identify with minority groups, those who do not feel that they fit with traditional norms and focus on policies that would help these groups integrate better. In contrast, Republicans affiliate themselves with traditional views- they want to keep the status quo (Barone, 2019). In our current society, this means Democrats support the interests of people of color, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and other outliers in society, while Republicans support the blue-collar workers and traditional values (for example, the nuclear family).

The Electoral College system outlined in our Constitution creates larger parties because people are more broadly divided into the winning candidate or the losing one- smaller parties like the Green Party have a difficult time winning electoral vote, meaning that it is almost impossible to win an election. This system has also created the plutocracy that the United States gravitates toward. A plutocracy is a government that is run by the interests of the wealthy. Because of our current “winner takes all” system, presidential campaigns focus on a few “swing states” which could either vote red or blue. In Swing States like Pennsylvania and Michigan, candidates spent 133 million dollars and 95 million dollars respectively on political ads (Schleifer, 2024). Candidates get this funding from political action committees (PACs), which are groups consisting of businesses and individuals. They are allowed to raise money up to a certain limit. Super PACs are similar, although they do not contribute money to a specific

candidate. In 2022, super PACs raised over 2.7 billion dollars to support various political causes (Bustillo, 2023). This is supported by the critical perspective of an analyst. Finance, insurance, and real estate raise the majority of the money coming from PACs- over a billion dollars since 1989. In addition, the contributions from middle class, non-wealthy Americans are negligible- “one out of five political donors makes \$500,000 a year, and another three out of five make over \$100,000” (Sifry, 2006, p. 5). With these statistics, it becomes crystal clear that the contributions made to candidates are made by the ultra-rich and those same people then have a say in the policies created by the administration. Because candidates need significant amounts of funding to run a successful campaign, they are then beholden to the interests of the groups that funded them- most often, large corporations and businesses, not the citizens who have to live under their administration, creating a plutocracy.

The United States also operates on a capitalist economic system- it entails private ownership of property and goods, within a free market where items can be sold or bought based on supply and demand (Mahmud & Jahan, n.d.). In the United States, the government has a hand in our economy- as outlined in the American Government textbook, “[the] government builds highways, educates our children... regulates economic activity, preventing monopoly, insider stock trading...” (Heineman, 1995, p. 266). The fact that the United States is capitalist is widely accepted, and not something that changes between administrations. Both Democrat and Republican candidates clearly support capitalism.

Alternative Viewpoints & Critical Arguments

For the most part, American politics are controlled by the two major parties that our nation switches between- the Democrats and the Republicans. Despite the two-party system, however, third parties and more “radical” viewpoints exist. The first example of this is the Green

Party- a political party focused on resolving climate issues and giving power back to citizens, not the top 1%. Although they have seen some success on the national stage, with Ralph Nader gaining 2 million votes in the 2000 election, they have not been able to gain a higher political position due to our electoral college system. Libertarians, who believe the government should be less involved in people's lives, and the Constitution Party, which believes in a stricter interpretation of the Constitution, are other third parties that exist in the United States. There are over 54 different political parties in the United States, but none are prominent enough to change the status quo (Nwazota, 2021).

The lack of representation of third parties can be attributed to the plutocracy that the United States has become. Because we have developed a system where only the parties with corporate and wealthy donors can win, grassroots campaigns have almost no chance of running a successful campaign. Political parties can only get government funding if they received a certain percentage of votes from the previous election, something that new movements cannot achieve. They have to raise money themselves, which means having to run ads, travel across the country, and generally spend funding they do not have. While it is clear that the two party system does not allow for nuanced perspectives, there is no potential for that to change with the influence of third parties because their movements are restricted to the smallest scale. The only candidates who win are the ones who have the interests of the wealthy at heart. The Green Party and Libertarians are just two examples of the countless political organizations that oppose supporting the top one percent, but as long as they are not allowed to expand to a large-scale campaign, they will not be able to change the status quo of America.

Other critical viewpoints corroborate the viewpoint of the United States as a plutocracy- analysts argue that although the U.S. is not governed by the rich directly, the nation is still

controlled by them. One states that "...the bottom 50% of the wage earners holds approximately 2.5% of all wealth in the US. This means that the bottom half of this population has a net wealth of about \$3.1 trillion. The five richest Americans own approximately one-third of that amount. The ten richest Americans own about two-thirds of that amount. The richest thirty Americans have as much wealth as the bottom 50%. Given that wage earners only include adults and many times they are the sole earners in their household, in a nation of 335 million individuals with nearly seventy-five million children, easily the thirty wealthiest are worth more than 200 million plus individuals" (Schultz, 2025, para. 5). These shocking statistics reveal that through different administrations, through Democrats and Republicans, the wealthy have consistently gotten richer- and that wealth outweighs the wellbeing of the American people. Schultz continues by arguing that this status quo cannot exist forever- the people will revolt, or the system will become more repressive to prevent rebellion.

An economist corroborates this argument by stating that the plutocracy and decline in the West's power compared to China (lower GDP, less global influence) is directly connected to a failing capitalist system. The Republicans continue to blame minorities for the decline, and Democrats are not focusing on the link of the worse quality of life to capitalism, meaning no one is directly addressing the issue (Wolff, 2024). Although it may be true that capitalism is no longer an effective economic policy, it will not change, no matter who becomes president- it is a matter of American pride and interwoven with patriotism.

The Political Compass

The political compass, a tool that organizes political views on a scale of left to right economically, and libertarian to authoritarian politically, demonstrates the complete conformity of the two main parties in the United States. On the x-axis, the left advocates for more

government spending, while the right advocates for a reduction on government spending. Politically, libertarians advocate for less government intervention in people's lives and choices while authoritarians advocate for more government control and direction on social norms. In the 2020 election, both Biden and Trump were at the top right corner of the graph (authoritarian and right). The 2024 election looked similar (The Political Compass, n.d.). The fact that both candidates were in the same quadrant of the political compass demonstrates how although they present themselves as opposing parties, they actually agree on similar policies and have similar political views. In addition, the lack of a candidate from a primary party who represents any of the other four quadrants emphasizes the perspective that candidates do not represent different viewpoints of the citizens.

In the 2024 election, Cornell West (Independent) and Jill Stein (Green Party) are in the bottom left quadrant, meaning they are leaning left and libertarian. Chase Oliver (Libertarian) is in the bottom right, meaning he is right and libertarian (The Political Compass, n.d.). Although smaller parties, they represent the less mainstream interests that the Democrat and Republican candidates did not promote in the election. Their interests are not being supported nearly as much, allowing the status quo to exist because the same two schools of thought (which overlap) continue to dominate.

Climate Change- Change Between Administrations?

Climate change is not just a scientific issue, but a matter of policy- the government needs to be willing to take serious action to prevent the further destruction of the planet. It is a polarizing issue that is becoming increasingly important as just two years ago, “there were 27 individual weather and climate disasters with at least \$1 billion in damages” (Smith, 2025, para. 1). Natural disasters are only getting more severe, and the Pew Research Center demonstrates

that it is not just an issue for scientists. Their research shows that six in ten Americans state that elected officials are not doing enough to address climate issues, and that eight in ten are frustrated by the polarization on the issue (Kennedy & Tyson, 2024). Because climate change is an important policy issue, and one that Democrats and Republicans seemingly disagree on, why has the government not stopped climate change from getting significantly worse? Despite the widespread support for policy on climate change, the policies actually enacted by each party demonstrate that the status quo does not change much between administrations- all of them ultimately cater to the wealthy.

In 2021, Joe Biden attended a climate summit and committed to cutting the United State's carbon emissions by over 50% compared to 2005 levels by 2030 (Sullivan & Liptack, 2021). Almost five years later, our nation is still nowhere near achieving that goal. With the policies currently in effect, we will only be able to cut 22% of our emissions, a far cry from the promises the Democrat president made (Catsaros, 2024). Although Biden had passed some policy to stop climate change, namely the Inflation Reduction Act to invest in clean energy, he has also passed policy that reverses the impact that his climate positive actions would have. This is clearly demonstrated with his 18 billion dollars' worth of tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and solar panels. "Biden's tariffs on Chinese exports to the US include a 100 percent levy on electric vehicles and a 25 percent tariff on EV and non-EV batteries... steel, and aluminum. He also imposed a 50% tariff on solar cells" (Gleckman, 2024, para. 2). These tariffs mean increased prices for environmentally friendly products, increasing dependence on fossil fuel companies that already have a monopoly on energy in the US (Exxon Mobil, Chevron, etc). (Goodman, 2024). During Biden's presidency, it was one step forward and one step back for climate change- ultimately demonstrating that under a Democrat president, the status quo will continue to stay the

same. At the end of the day, even the party that advocates stopping climate change still serves the interests of big corporations.

Donald Trump's presidency had an even more dire effect on climate policy- beginning from his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, which had the goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% by 2030 (Columbia Law School, 2019). Trump's policies have consistently favored fossil fuels- the "big oil" companies that benefit from his policy decisions do so because of their financial support to his campaign. The Brennan Center for Justice did a complete analysis on Trump's climate policy and found that it directly supports his donors. "His signature legislative package — which one executive deemed "positive for us across all of our top priorities" — gives oil and gas firms \$18 billion in tax incentives while rolling back incentives for clean energy alternatives... in just his first 100 days back in office, Trump took at least 145 actions to undo environmental rules... [he] cleared the way for Energy Transfer Partners (which extracts liquefied natural gas) to extend a major project. Warren's personal wealth grew nearly 10 percent after the administration greenlit the project" (Bacska, 2025, para. 6-8). It is clear that Trump's climate policies do not support the American citizens- with the 14 million Americans being exposed to carcinogens from oil and gas sites, and the 80% of Americans who want the issue to be addressed, both Democrat and Republican presidents repeatedly put funding over the future of their constituents (Sadowski, 2022).

The Wealth Disparity Remains Unaddressed

Although the Republicans and Democrats claim to have opposing policies, the one demographic they both try to appeal to during campaigns are the working class. When visiting his hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Biden stated that the election was "between Scranton and Park Avenue" (Wilkie, 2020, para. 3). Meanwhile, Trump claimed that he would "protect

everyday Americans from an influx of immigrant labor... return manufacturing jobs to the U.S., to support rural areas and families with children" (Hager, 2024, para. 3). Despite both of their claims, the status quo of the government catering to the rich continues no matter the administration.

Despite the Trump administration's claims that he represented the working class American, he has taken a multitude of actions in the first 100 days of his current presidency that suggest otherwise. Most notably, he fired two thirds of the employees at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and laid off 90% of the staff at the Department of Labor (Bivens et al., 2025). Even within the government, Trump is willing to hurt the workers that keep our nation running. At the same time, he puts workers down, he brings billionaires and the wealthy up. Trump signed 4 trillion dollars of tax cuts for the ultrawealthy into law in July of 2025. These tax cuts do not simply benefit the wealthy; they actively add trillions of dollars to the national debt, all while cutting the social safety nets that many Americans rely on to survive (Drucker, 2025). No matter the promises that he made in his campaign, the fact is that one in four Americans live paycheck to paycheck, while the 1% of the nation are continually given tax breaks and loopholes around the law (Lin-Fisher, 2025). The status quo of the United States as moving toward a plutocracy is cemented by the government allowing billionaires to continue to build wealth while the majority of the population are simply surviving.

Although the Biden administration created policy that gave back to the poor, they still did not fulfill their campaign promise to reduce the wealth gap. Although he tried to address the wealth gap with policies like the American Rescue Plan Act, which stabilized the economy after COVID-19, there was more inflation during his administration than there has been in the last four decades, and wealth inequality continues to be as much of an issue as it is under Trump

(Picchi, 2025). Although he made more of an effort to help the working class American, as demonstrated by his policies and the fact that he inherited a damaged economy after COVID-19, the wealth gap remained.

Military Spending Over Public Assistance

Another issue concerning American citizens is where the money from their taxes are going- and a significant amount of that is going toward funding the military. Despite the fact that the United States is not directly fighting in any wars, the government continually increases our military spending. A significant amount of this money has gone to overseas conflicts- but as the conflicts we have interfered in over the past few decades have claimed 3.6 million lives with no clear reduction in violence, it is obvious that our military budget might be better spent improving infrastructure, or creating social safety nets (Brabnec, 2023). Despite the harm caused by our military spending, both administrations continue to increase funding, benefitting military contractors while hurting the average citizen.

Even the Biden administration, which campaigned on reducing military spending, increased the budget every year that Biden was in office. For the 2025 fiscal year, he requested a budget of 850 billion dollars- a 4.1% increase from 2023. The bulk of the budget, 338 billion dollars, goes towards operations and maintenance (O'Hanlon & Rocha, 2024). Increasing military spending in no way helps the average American- so why do Biden and other Democrat presidents continually increase it? It is because of the military industrial complex. As the Quincy Institute explains, “The military-industrial complex involves the collaboration of the uniformed military and the arms industry in promoting spending that serves their bureaucratic interests and corporate bottom lines, often independently of or in contradiction to considerations of America’s actual security needs”. The government spends tax dollars on the military not to help the

American citizens, but to line the pockets of corporations- further demonstrating how our government is shifting into a plutocracy. From 2020 to 2024, during Biden's presidency, private firms have gotten over 54% of the discretionary spending allocated to the Pentagon (Hartung & Semler 2025). No matter campaign promises, the seemingly massive divide between parties, and the constant comparisons to the opposite party, Democrats still fund massive corporations while leaving struggling Americans to fend for themselves.

Donald Trump made it abundantly clear that he wanted to increase military spending during his administration. His policy was that in order to deter conflict, the United States needed to present a strong military front- leading to his budget proposal for the fiscal year of 2026 to be over 1 trillion dollars. (Dewey, 2025). As outlined in the previous paragraph, the military spending budgets primarily help the corporations and contractors hired to manufacture weapons and equipment- in addition to only supporting massive companies, the spending is currently being used as a method to deploy the National Guard in multiple cities. The constitutionality of this move is being questioned- the National Guard can only be deployed by the federal government when there is an extraordinary crisis in that state. States like Oklahoma are appealing Trump's decision to deploy the Guard, stating that the circumstances needed to warrant their presence without the consent of the governor did not exist (Katz, 2025). Whether constitutional or not, the fact that the military budget is being used to exert federal influence on states that have no clear crisis further demonstrates the lack of concern for American citizens that the government has.

Trump's Presidency

It has been less than a year since Donald Trump was inaugurated for his second term, and although the fundamental status quo has not changed, Trump has pushed the limits of executive

power. The guidelines established in the Constitution: only Congress has the power to declare war, they have to approve tariffs, and a governor needs to approve the deployment of the National Guard in their state, for example. In addition, he has gotten rid of long-lasting precedents- federal funding for universities, the peaceful transfer of power, and protections for immigrants. He ordered a missile strike on Iran and sent the National Guard to California without congressional or state approval (Smith, 2025). These overreaches of what he should be able to do as president signal the collapse of our carefully built system of checks and balances. Every future president has a more powerful path paved for them- and although it is unlikely that the fundamental political and economic structure of the United States will change his dismissal of the Constitution and previous precedents is especially dangerous.

Conclusion

The United States will continue to run on the same endless loop. With the two-party system, there is no potential for other, more nuanced political views to gain any real power- meaning that the Democrats and Republicans keep presenting the American people with unappealing candidates. Because these parties are funded by the wealthy and therefore work in the top one percent's interests, the plutocracy that the United States government will continue, no matter which side is in office.

By analyzing the political compass, the conformity of the Democrats and Republicans to a right, authoritarian viewpoint becomes clear. In addition, third parties with different perspectives are not represented fairly in American politics, meaning they have no say in how the people are governed.

Through analysis of climate change, the wealth disparity, and military funding, it is clear that in situations where there is a clear decision that would benefit the American people, the

president often works against that decision. Democrats campaign on promises of a more accepting, equal, brighter future, but present the status quo on a slightly different platter. Republicans promise a reversal back to the “great” version of America, but fail to realize that vision, instead delivering more poverty. Both work for the interests of the elite- and until those changes, the status quo will not change either.

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