

The 2024 Elections and the Status Quo

Samantha Schirado

Department of Political Science, Diablo Valley College

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Adjunct Professor: John Kropf

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Abstract

April 29, 2025, marks the end of 47th President Donald Trump's first 100 days in office of his second term. Notably, those worried about President Trump's reelection and resumption of the most powerful office in the land will likely point to recent polls that indicate President Trump's current approval rating (according to CNN Politic polls) is the lowest for any newly elected president at 100 days dating back at least seven decades. Donald Trump's political and economic stance in comparison with defeated presidential candidate Kamala Harris had notable differences in regulatory environments, tax policies, and how to address health care policies. President Trump, within his first 100 days, has certainly attempted to make good on many of his campaign promises regarding these economic and political arenas while also further igniting differences between the two-party system, at times fostering hostility and restricting diversity throughout the country with an increasingly unchecked rhetoric by both the President himself and many of his Cabinet. While a seemingly savvy businessperson in his past, President Trumps' approach to the presidency questions the current status quo while also potentially undermining or eroding the judicial and legislative pillars of the federal government that have long served and were intended to be, appropriate checks and balances to the executive branch. Seemingly gone are the days of globalization and Keynesian economics that have steered policy development and the federal government's approach to demand and supply and a refocused, inward view, is taking shape – whether this will benefit the majority of those residing in the United States is yet to be seen and history will be the ultimate judge. One thing is for certain, the Status Quo is only that until it is not – and following the 2024 election, it certainly seems to be changing at least in incremental ways.

The 2024 Elections and the Status Quo

Following President Trump's re-election and history making return to the most powerful office in the world as only the second president ever to be elected to non-consecutive terms, the country has watched as he has attempted to make good on many of his campaign promises, sometimes regardless of not fully considering the outcomes of the actions, such as the most recent tariff war occurring in the global economy, sparked by his Liberation Day tariffs and national emergency declaration on April 2, 2025, with the average United States citizen and non-citizen paying the price for what is promised to be a long-term strategy for resetting not only the United States economy, but perhaps also the global economy as a result. The status quo previously appeared to include the general dynamic of agreeance between a sitting president and the party which supported them; however, this is eroding with President Trump with more of the mainstream, less right-wing conservatives within his own party remaining silent on their support for his requests and actions or even sometimes voicing their own opposition in a politically nuanced way.

Prior to the election, both parties believed in their respective candidates; although the Republican Party gained tremendous momentum forward when Democrats switched from supporting incumbent Joe Biden to Kamala Harris and appeared to be grasping at salvaging any hopes of keeping a Democratic nominee. The months leading up to the election were some of the most polarizing months in recent United States history between political parties which spilled into marked divisiveness within the United States with some believing that the world would come to an end depending on which candidate was ultimately elected. Prior to the election and in the months before President Trump took office it could be argued that the status quo of politics within the United States would not change that much especially due to the checks and balances of power that exist within the legislative and judicial branches of the government;

however, 100 days in to the second Trump presidency may indicate a further variation from the current, but already changing status quo.

History of Political Parties: Divided Parties for a Divided Country

The United States has two primary or main groups of politicians resulting in a two-party system between Democrats and Republicans the history of which is somewhat complex. Initially, the first United States president, George Washington, was non-partisan. As the United States Constitution was being drafted two different schools of thought resulting in two different parties began to form. Federalists were in favor of the Constitution and were inclined to have a stronger federal government that held much of the power over its citizens; on the contrary, the Anti-Federalists were in favor of a smaller federal government and that more power should be pushed to individual states and provide more rights for the individual person. The Federalist Party officially formed in 1791 during George Washington's first term with the opposing party, the Republican party, later known as the Democratic-Republican Party forming shortly after. Throughout the following 69 years from 1791 to 1860, both parties changed names and viewpoints on what were current issues for their times. The Federalist Party remained in power until 1801, when Thomas Jefferson became president. The Democratic-Republican party held power officially until 1825 when they broke into two separate groups, including the National Republicans which helped form the Whig Party, which became one of the two prevailing parties of the time in addition to the Democrats. The Republican Party rose to existence as we mostly know it as all existing parties, including the two prevailing parties, became split in their thoughts regarding slavery in the 1850s. Abraham Lincoln's presidency solidified the two main parties we know today, the Democratic and Republican party (Wesgate, 2021).

Since that time the Democratic and Republican parties have maintained general differences in policy alignment and thought process regarding power of government; however,

politicians on both sides have presented the ability to disagree but remain respectful, mostly, of other positions. However, more recently hostilities between both parties have intensified as polarizing positions regarding LGBTQ+ rights, transgender athlete rights specifically, abortion rights (including the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*), gun rights, and immigration are hot topics among politicians and constituents represented by each party.

Republicans and Democrats have differing views of how the government should be run and according to a Pew Research Center report from June 2024 at the point where then President Biden withdrew from the presidential candidate consideration to endorse incoming candidate Kamala Harris, the American people also had significant opinions on the role of the federal government and how or if each party was acting in the best interest of the American people. Among registered voters, the largest majority of Biden/Harris supporters favored a bigger, more activist government. Specifically, 74% advised they would rather have a bigger government providing more services, 76% noted the government should do more to solve problems, and 80% indicated government aid to the poor was overall more positively impactful than harmful. Trump supporters, by solid margins, took the opposing view on all three of those questions. Democratic support for a larger government remained at nearly the highest level in the last five decades dating back to the 1990s. There were also significant areas of agreement with the majority of voters (82% of Biden/Harris and 78% of Trump supporters) looked at the long-term future of Social Security and agreed that benefits should not be reduced in any way. Similarly, most Americans surveyed indicated the federal government has a responsibility to make sure all Americans have health care coverage. The most alarming figure from the Pew Research Center report, however, is indicative of how divided Americans are about federal government, but also how much trust or lack thereof they have in the federal government to effectively do what they believe is its job. At the time of the report in June 2024, only 22% of American adults said they trusted the government to do what is right always or most of the time,

though this number is up slightly from June 2023 when the percentage hovered at 16%. Even more concerning was young adult's attitude about the country's, or government's ability to solve problems – 52% of those surveyed indicated the United States cannot solve many of its important problems. Six-in-ten young adults (adults under 30 years old) said the government cannot solve major problems. The disparities in government role and scope between Democrats and Republicans are accentuated within partisans by race, ethnicity and income (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Although most Americans vote and otherwise endorse the two-party system, it is worthy of mentioning other relevant “third parties” that influence politics, two of which Green Party and Libertarians, have grown at a significantly higher pace of registered voters between elections dating back from 2016 until present. Libertarians value economic liberty, a free and competitive market, and believe the only role of government in the economic realm is to protect property rights, adjudicate disputes, and provide a legal framework that protects voluntary trade – efforts made to control or manage trade are deemed as improper in their ideal society. In a similar standpoint to focusing internally on the United States, Libertarians believe that the United States government should not be a global police force and should focus resources on Americans instead. Additionally, Libertarians support the rights of what they deem as the smallest minority, meaning they support the rights of the individual and believe no individual, group, or government may rightly initiate force against any other with sexual orientation, preference, gender, or gender identity having no impact on government treatment including marriage, child custody, military service laws, adoption, or immigration to name a few (Libertarian Party, 2024).

The Green Party's ten key values include grassroots democracy, social justice and equal opportunity, ecological wisdom, non-violence, decentralization, community-based economics, feminism and gender equality, respect for diversity, personal and global responsibility, and future focus and sustainability (Ten Key Values, 2024). These third parties do not generally

affect the outcome of a presidential election; however, they can affect smaller regional or state elections in a demonstrative fashion. The only problem is that the two major parties are not fully representative of all American voters who wish to influence the outcome of elections and who have to choose between voting their conscience and ideals versus voting for a major party candidate who, in their mind, may be the best of the worst.

In reviewing the Political Compass' scale the candidates of the two major political parties and the so-called third parties are not incredibly dissimilar. The Political Compass' scale ranges from left to right on the x-axis and authoritarian to libertarian from the top to bottom of the y-axis. All four of the major parties candidates Democratic Presidential candidate Kamala Harris, Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate Tim Walz, Republican Presidential candidate and now President, Donald Trump, and Republican Vice-Presidential candidate JD Vance are all aligned in the same right-authoritarian quadrant, although there is a degree of variance between them within the quadrant with Harris and Walz not as authoritarian or as far-right as Trump and Vance. The two leading third-party candidates Jill Stein and Chase Oliver fall both toward the libertarian side of the y-axis; however, Stein is left leaning, and Oliver is right leaning. Unfortunately, or fortunately depending on how it is viewed, the two major political parties are not all that dissimilar in their viewpoints and their operational status as politicians, narrowing the scope of viewpoints that the American voter can consider. This is why, aside from the previously mentioned rhetoric and potential attacks on the other branches of government from both Trump and Vance combined, the overall status quo will be questioned, but how far it will change is up for debate.

Where Does Trump Fit?

President Trump has twice been the Republican candidate and sitting present for the Republican Party and although the Republican Party has historically, in it's various forms, been

against a stronger central government, Trump certainly uses the power granted to and one could argue in excess of, the intrinsic power granted to the executive branch of the government to steer his policy and party decisions through executive orders. In comparison to his first-term 100 days in office where he signed 35 Executive Orders, through his 100th day in office during his current term, Trump has signed 139 executive orders according to the National Archives Federal Register (2025 Donald J. Trump, 2025), many of which are currently undergoing legal challenges through the judicial branch of government. In keeping with traditional Republican values, Trump did establish, through an Executive Order, the Department of Government Efficiency or DOGE as part of his “Day One” promise to maximize governmental efficiency and productivity by modernizing Federal technology and software (The White House, 2025), though in actuality DOGE has focused more on cutting costs and laying off federal employees who are deemed not relevant to operations rather than focusing on modernization solutions. Trump’s slogan of “Make America Great Again” during his first campaign hinted at what could be described as an “America First” stance toward globalization and the end of Keynesian economic policy that has been in place for decades, only beginning to erode following the financial crisis of 2008. Much to the delight of the Republican voting base, Trump focused his past Presidency and his most recent running platform on promoting the success of the individual citizen of the United States as opposed to focusing outwardly on stabilizing and promoting a global economy, which can be clearly seen by the opening statement of President Trumps 2025 Trade Policy Agenda: “The United States of America is the most extraordinary nation the world has ever known” (The President’s, 2025).

So where does Trump fall within the current political spectrum – the answer is more unclear than concrete. What is apparent, is Trump will continue to use the power of the Executive Branch to push the limits of what is possible in a presidency, the question remains whether this will result in benefits or disparities for the average individual living in the United

States. This was recently echoed by Vice President JD Vance in a February 9, 2024, X post in which he stated in part “...Judges aren’t allowed to control the executive’s legitimate power” (JD Vance [@JDVance]. (2025, February 09)). While the overall status quo of the political and economic system may remain somewhat stable, the potential erosion of historical checks and balances among the three branches of government may ultimately affect how the American democracy is viewed on a global scale as well as how it functions internally.

The growing chasm of American politics isn’t simply a matter of party dysfunction; it is a product of a profoundly different conception of government’s place in people’s lives. Conservatives have consistently maintained that fiscal restraint, a strong national defense, a responsible and moral society, and limited government are the very underpinnings of their collective philosophy. The sharp Democratic lurch to the left toward bigger federal programs, higher taxes and broad social policies is seen by many conservatives as an affront: an assault on personal freedoms, and an undermining of the country’s exceptional nature. And it’s because the spirit of civil conversation has been degraded, not just at the dinner table, but at campuses and cultural institutions that have lost sight of the balance of power and the exchange of ideas: where so often conservative voices are consigned as hateful voices rather than debated as points of view.

What’s more, the fact that populist conservatism is on the ascent reflects the fact that more and more working- and middle-class voters feel forsaken by establishment elites in both parties. This new conservatism, represented by leaders such as President Trump and Senator JD Vance, embraces national sovereignty, economic self-reliance, and the conservation of tradition and heritage. Conservatives widely say that America’s global entanglements and open-border policies are putting American workers and families last. Bad Ideas Have Consequences As the political establishment continues to fail the people we are seeing more and more executive orders providing directives for how new legislation will be exercised and applied, not

to mention where they will fail to be applied. When Vice President Vance said “Judges don’t get to control the executive’s legitimate power,” he was echoing a criticism of the checks and balances system on the right, which is that activist courts have turned the checks and balances system on its head, legislating from the bench instead of interpreting the law as written.

Although under fire from progressives and the establishment press, many conservatives are hopeful that the best is still to come for America—if the nation can rediscover its foundation. Ensuring free speech, upholding the Constitution, securing the border and preserving American values are no longer partisan talking points, they are a matter of national survival. Indeed, conservatives often assert that trust in government is as low as it is not because there is too little government, but because there is too much: too much spending, too many regulations, too little accountability. And re-establishing it, in their estimation, means renewing the commitment to federalism, civic education, and empowering local communities instead of consolidating all power in Washington, D.C. And at a time of profound uncertainty, many conservatives think it is precisely those time-honored values — faith, family, freedom — that can point a divided nation toward unity and purpose.

Political Compass

In the U.S. presidential election of 2024, the major parties offered competing visions of America’s future, but the policy distinctions were often slight. The platforms of both parties were identical concerning the economic and social front except for very slight variations in terms of substantial reform. Third party candidates, R. F. Kennedy, Jill Stein, and Cornel West, were heard promoting a narrative of deeper changes, but systemic barriers from limited ballot access to tactical moves by the major parties to sideline them, curbed their influence. But again, the apparent insurgency of third-party challengers could not escape the drift toward a public appetite for straightforward, partisan reform of the rules

allowing for more political variety. Services such as the Political Compass can help to enhance our understanding of this dynamic and can illustrate the fact that the two-party division that appears to dominate the political discourse today is not actually representative of the full range of political ideologies and policy preferences in the body politic. On the basis of my compass, I am in an unusual place which combines economic liberalism and social political control. On the economic left-right scale, I am still fairly neutral at -0.13. This shows that I am not super economically right or left. I instead support a "mixed economy" in which the force of the market and government action is properly balanced in order to serve the public interest and to be stabilizing. I do not favor complete state control of the economy, but I am a proponent of regulating the economy to promote fairness and decrease disparities. It is balance in outlook, which maintains that both market-based growth holds virtues as well as targeted government intervention in solving social problems. On the social axis, I score 4.41 for social, closer to the authoritarian pole – indicating a value on institutions and social order. I just lean towards being for stability and authorities and security, and I might be more in favor of laws restricting what you can do with your persons, so we maintain traditional values. This may sound contradictory to a more libertarian mindset, but it reflects a fundamental belief that governance does have a critical role in maintaining the norms and rules of society, and that people must adhere to them in order to protect the common good. This part of my political philosophy is that of needing that balance between individual liberty of freedom and the needs of society and a bias towards maintaining structure and institutions as means of maintaining social uniformity. Conversely, Kamala Harris sits in the center-left quadrant of the political compass to reflect her moderate Democratic ideology. She has been a practical leader, more focused on pragmatism than ideology, fighting for the policies that will maintain our progressive values while getting things done. So what? Harris is for climate action and

reproductive freedom and even some economic populism in the form of bringing back industry and winning the global race with China. On the social front, I am more of an authoritarian. I lean more toward dictatorial authoritarianism than does Harris, who takes a middle path. But on the economic side, I am more similar to Harris. We both support a mixed approach to economic policy: government intervention on social issues while maintaining the market economy. This convergence reflects a common recognition of the need to provide pragmatic answers to society's complex problems. Although Kamala Harris and Donald Trump are usually depicted as opposites politically, the political compass shows there to be an interesting level of overlap that belies such characterization. Both figures end up at center to center-right positions on economic issues, as Trump pushes tax cuts and deregulation, and Harris, as a Democrat, pushes pro-business growth and does not lean too far to the left on economic issues (because she is not out there pushing for universal basic income nor 100% wealth redistribution). Socially, Trump is more authoritarian, desiring strong law enforcement and strict immigration, but Harris is no bleeding heart, having prioritized tough-on-crime policies in the past and stressing national security despite her democratic cover. Though varying in tone, rhetoric and concrete priorities, what their place on the compass shows is that in systemic structure and governance neither moves in the direction of radical reform, both leaning instead on centralized control and pragmatic economics. This coincidence demonstrates how political branding can obscure underlying ideological affinities.

The 2024 campaign and the first 100 days of a second Trump presidential term highlight how for all the theatrically entertained polarization of American politics, the practical bounds of its debates tend to remain within a narrow ideological range. The political compass aids in revealing this, because it maps policy tendencies, not just party

labels. The words and phrases deployed by Trump and Harris differ dramatically, but their economic aims and institutional means have more in common than not, both upholding a political order of centralized state power and moderate market systems. Opposition voices also, while ideologically different, find it difficult to reverse the prevailing paradigm from outside the fold, because of structural constraints. Economically more centrist but also socially more authoritarian, to share the territory on the political compass I place myself there, alongside, now Harris, on economic policy, with sharper differences in the direction of authority and order. Ultimately, the political compass is an insistent reminder that American politics today is not so much a battle between opposites as between iterations of the status quo, not an arena for ideological insurgencies or upheavals, at least within the narrow confines of a two-party system.

Conclusion

So, what this analysis makes clear is that no matter who is in the White House, be it a one-term Joe Biden or a Donald Trump who returns for a second term, the most likely outcome for the United States is not sweeping change but simply more of the same. Despite political rhetoric on each side that aspires to evoke such transformative visions, Trump's promise to make America "great again," or Democrats casting themselves as the stewards of democracy and progress, the deeper architectural foundations of American governance and the paucity of the range of political ideologies permissible even within mainstream politics suggest that such promises are more symbolic than substantive. The return of Trump to power has undeniably changed the tone and style of governance; the president brought back his trademark populist nationalism, hardline immigration policies and hostility towards globalist institutions. But even now, in the beginning of his second term, we can see that the basic structure of America's political economy (the system of government

apparatus, businesses, and institutions that shape and push policies) remains in place. His administration has pursued policies that crawl to corporate interests, uphold a law-and-order mentality and remain loyal to the sort of centralized executive powers that are associated with the authoritarian-right quadrant of the political compass. A general ideological vicinity which he and his one-time challenger Kamala Harris both inhabited, even though at opposite poles. His case is based more on sentiment than practicality; more on spectacle than structures being pulled down.

Had Biden prevailed in winning a second term, the result might not have been a vastly different one, in substance if not in tone. The presidency of Biden stressed bipartisanship, incremental change, and the reestablishment of democratic norms. His economic track record, while occasionally cast in partisan terms as “progressive,” generally hewed to a neoliberal script, featuring incremental adjustments, not the broader change many on the left had sought. As I pointed out earlier in the essay, figures like Kamala Harris, who are often seen as a progressive, actually fit comfortably within the existing capitalist system, which balances moderate regulation with strong institutional power. There is little room or desire for the kind of specific, transformative change that many Americans feel is necessary. From the perspective of the sociopolitical compass, being economically center-left and socially authoritarian means aiming for fairness and equity within a regulated capitalist system, while also prioritizing control, stability, and the preservation of institutions. From this standpoint, neither Trump nor Biden offers the kind of real, disruptive change that would break from the current order. Instead, both operate within a tightly structured system that values continuity and consensus over true reform. That is why, regardless of which party wins, the lived experience for most Americans — economically and socially — remains largely unchanged.

So, in essence, the response to the central question is a sobering one: America is not going to be “great again” in the transformative fashion that Trump promises, nor would it have markedly changed if there were to be another Biden term. In both cases, the political machinery of government, a century of bipartisan neoliberalism and a two-party death grip, keeps on ticking away for the most part unabated. And the charade is kept up, the cart is held up of “choice,” but all the actual policy outcomes continue to be so similar. Until the political system becomes genuinely receptive to ideological diversity — including voices located outside the narrow Democrat-Republican binary — America will simply continue to swap out rulers and catchphrases, while the ship stays roughly on course.

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