

Question:

According to Document 1 and Document 2, what role did money play in last year's American presidential election?

Common thread / *fil conducteur commun aux deux articles*

Both documents argue that **money concentrated in the hands of a few billionaires has become a decisive force in American politics**, shaping electoral outcomes, public agendas, and even threatening democratic principles.

Main ideas

1. Money as a political instrument

- *Document 1*: Jeffrey Winters defines oligarchs as wealthy individuals who use money to shape outcomes, often without holding office themselves. Campaign donations, such as Mellon's \$76.5 million to Trump, exemplify this influence.
- *Document 2*: President Biden warns that figures like Musk symbolize this rise of oligarchic power, where vast fortunes translate into political sway under Trump's incoming administration.

2. Distortion of democracy

- *Document 1*: Money undermines "one person, one vote" by allowing "some people" to exert disproportionate weight, especially since Citizens United dismantled most campaign finance restrictions.
- *Document 2*: Biden stresses that unchecked wealth threatens democracy itself, eroding equality of opportunity and fueling misinformation campaigns.

3. Historical and institutional parallels

- *Document 1*: Draws comparisons with earlier eras of backlash against robber barons and New Deal taxes targeting the wealthy. Suggests today marks "maximum oligarchic power."
- *Document 2*: Echoes Eisenhower's farewell address, shifting from the "military-industrial complex" to a "tech-industrial complex" dominated by social media giants and AI.

4. Reactions and possible remedies

- *Document 1*: Predicts popular anger and backlash will eventually arise, as in past crises.
- *Document 2*: Biden proposes concrete reforms—term limits, ethics for Congress, restrictions on the Supreme Court, and constitutional amendments to curb presidential immunity.

Comparative angle

- *Document 1* offers a **conceptual and historical framework** for understanding how money functions as power.

- *Document 2* provides a **political warning and illustrative examples**, showing how this dynamic is already unfolding and what reforms might be required.
- Together, they depict money not just as campaign fuel but as a **structural force undermining democracy**.

Model answer

Both documents stress that money played a decisive and deeply troubling role in the most recent American presidential election, concentrating political influence in the hands of a small group of ultrawealthy individuals and thereby undermining democratic principles.

According to Document 1, billionaire figures such as Elon Musk epitomize a new kind of American oligarch. Unlike traditional officeholders, these individuals exert power by pouring vast sums into campaigns or by aligning their businesses with government interests. Jeffrey Winters explains that oligarchs are not merely donors but political actors who use money as an instrument to shape agendas, as illustrated by Timothy Mellon's multimillion-dollar support for Donald Trump. Such practices, amplified by the Citizens United ruling, allow money to distort the basic rule of "one person, one vote," replacing it with an unequal system where wealth translates into political weight.

Document 2 complements this analysis by presenting President Biden's farewell address, in which he directly warns that an oligarchy of billionaires now threatens the nation's democratic fabric. While not naming Trump explicitly, Biden highlights Musk's outsized influence in the incoming administration and draws historical parallels to Eisenhower's warning against the "military-industrial complex," now transformed into a "tech-industrial complex." He argues that unchecked financial and technological power corrodes democratic institutions, fuels misinformation, and prioritizes profit over urgent issues such as climate change.

Both documents emphasize the historical continuity of oligarchic power. Document 1 recalls past episodes of backlash, from the robber barons to New Deal taxation, suggesting that anger eventually erupts against excessive inequality. Document 2, however, insists on immediate institutional remedies: ethics reforms in Congress, limits on Supreme Court power, and constitutional amendments to restrict presidential immunity. These measures are presented as necessary to contain the growing influence of money and restore democratic checks and balances.

Taken together, the two documents paint a coherent picture: money has become more than a tool for financing campaigns; it is now a structural force that skews representation, undermines equality, and concentrates power in ways incompatible with democratic ideals. The election revealed an unprecedented alignment between billionaire influence and political authority, leaving the future of American democracy in jeopardy. (353 words)