How does the UK view the US election?

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(Dec. 8, 2024, London, UK) For having a famous 'special relationship,' the US and UK are not very similar. Their existing cultural differences have grown exponentially in the past few years as they diverge socially and economically. The UK loves to watch US elections, but they do not care about the outcome. The common sentiment is that "nothing will change either way."

The issue has roots in the UK's elections. The Brits do not directly elect their Prime Minister: rather their majority party chooses their head of state. As for election spending, the British cannot spend more than £54,000 (approximately $68,000) per seat in parliament, and TV and radio ads are not allowed. From announcement to new administration, the election cycle only lasts 6 weeks—there's never any lame duck period, either. The process is brutally fast, and most people barely pay attention. These days it is hard to even remember the names of all the recent PMs. In the last six years Britian has had six prime ministers.

By contrast, the extravagance and length of US elections makes great entertainment (sic). People in London endlessly talk about the hyper-partisan news and the crazy headlines. They stay up until 3 am to watch the debates and speculate. Some put bets on candidates. Interestingly, in the UK, Donald Trump is beloved by both sides for his entertaining style. In the end, either candidate could win and both sides still would be friends. It is more similar to how an American would watch baseball than an election—it's not taken seriously.

Additionally and critically important, most people have lost hope that things can get better. The UK economy has not grown since 2008, and the US is now more than $30,000 richer per person (measured in GDP per capita). The UK has many, many regulations – including programs like the National Health Service – that cut into the private sector. These programs are barely funded and are falling apart constantly, but neither political party wants to remove them. Companies do not want to set up in the UK because of these regulations, even before considering that they could quintuple their reach by setting up in the US instead.

As a result, the UK has found itself surviving on less and less each year. Top salaries are just barely livable, most people make minimum wage, and it's immensely difficult to find jobs. Inflation hit the UK much harder than the US, and people have gotten used to consumer prices that are much higher than the US. From Jan. of 2023 through Oct. of 2024 the cost of producing food in the UK rose 21%, and for the last six months has been rising at an annual rate of 28%, according to the UK Office of National Statistics. They do not expect the US to help them. Some people have hopes for a big trade deal with the US, but nobody expects too much.

The only big hope remaining is for the war in Ukraine to end. Many of the Brits with whom I spoke said that Ukraine is the only thing they care about. The war is not a distant proxy war, here—it is a reminder that Europe is never completely safe. The general feeling is that the UK is at the mercy of whatever Russia and the US choose. They want Trump to resolve the conflict as quickly and decisively as possible.

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