

# Elections (USA): Staring Into the Trumpian Abyss

Friday 15 November 2024, by [BLANC Eric](#), [DAY Meagan](#), [FEATHERSTONE Liza](#), [FRENCH Nick](#), [JÄGER Anton](#), [MAISANO Chris](#) (Date first published: 11 November 2024).

**We are about to be in for a long period of suffering in American and global politics at the hands of a deranged, reactionary president who will be up against little in the way of an opposition party.**

The country and world woke up to a terrifying yet in many ways predictable reality on Wednesday — one that few on the Left and in the Democratic Party are prepared to deal with. By all accounts, the coming years will be brutal for many: for the wide range of groups targeted by Donald Trump as objects of scorn and hate over the past eight years, for the working class as a whole, and for the planet. Our contributors and editors reflect on how we got here and what can be done to reverse course.

## ***Meagan Day: Democrats Can't Ignore the Tyranny of the Rich***

Between Donald Trump himself, top campaign surrogate Elon Musk, and J. D. Vance's kingmaker Peter Thiel, the Oval Office is poised to become a billionaires' lounge. The richest Americans have always exerted outsize pressure on politicians, who readily conform to their dictates or face consequences. But the usual class dynamics are set to be compounded by the direct intervention of individual, hyperideological capitalist cadres, who have grown bored with mere market domination and now pursue total social transformation.

The path lies open before them. With control of all three branches of government, the coming administration will likely waste no time in paring critical regulations, programs, and whole departments down to the bone. The result will be austerity for the many and an orgy of unrestrained profiteering for the few. Ordinary people's material conditions will deteriorate further, leaving the electorate increasingly alienated and agitated. People will continue to gravitate to whoever speaks most convincingly of a radical shake-up, which won't be the Democrats as we know them.

The Kamala Harris campaign was a mishmash of contradictory ideas — some cease-fire talk alongside the embrace of Dick Cheney's endorsement, some surprisingly decent progressive economic messaging alongside the usual reassurances to Wall Street. Its ambiguity was purposeful, masking a lack of commitment to any particular vision, bloc, or agenda. This sophisticated fence-sitting isn't a serviceable approach to politics. When people are spoiling for a fight, they'll find one. If there's no solidaristic option, the chauvinistic option will often suffice.

The only way to stop the Right's dystopian worldmaking is to play worldmaker back. An effective opposition would clearly identify the root cause of broad economic distress as the tyranny of the rich. It would propose to fix the problem by transforming privately hoarded wealth into public resources, which will be invested to make things easier and nicer for everyone else. These ideas can't be presented alongside their polar opposite; they must be the core of the project, and that needs to be obvious. The longer this approach is dismissed out of hand, the more Americans will fall

prey to reactionary pseudo-populist billionaires, mistaking the poison for the medicine.

— **Meagan Day**, associate editor

### ***Liza Featherstone: Labor Can't Keep Sitting Out***

What horror and sadness. In assessing Donald Trump's victory on Tuesday, the immediate reasons for Kamala Harris's defeat matter: a genocide in Gaza, poor and insufficient messaging on the Biden administration's real accomplishments, a campaign run by and for Silicon Valley plutocrats, and above all, inflation. Longer term, crucial to the plight we're in today is the decades-long decline of union density, which has deprived the working class of political power but also of a political home and identity.

To build left working-class power, we must keep building our unions — including organizing to make United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain's [call for a general strike](#) in May 2028 a success. We must also keep building socialist organizations, a project that feels hopeful not only in Brooklyn and Queens but in places like the Atlanta suburbs, where Gabriel Sanchez was elected to the state legislature on Tuesday. We also need to keep building organizations that can fight the far right in the swing states and counties that went overwhelmingly for Trump, work that even showed tangible successes: while Trump and the Republicans cruised to victory, seven [abortion rights referendums](#) passed, including in red and purple states like Montana, Colorado, Nevada, and Arizona.

Our political work cannot build power and shift policy without also beginning to heal the alienation in our society that led so many to vote for Trump. Isolation and loneliness, problems that were already worsening before the COVID-19 pandemic, have hit many Americans hard. Too many have died from suicide or addiction, while many more have gone online, lost in endless loops of insanely false and rage-fueling information, alone and growing angry at all the wrong people.

In this social desert, Trump's rallies gave many a sense of community where all who showed up were welcomed warmly. His second victory is a brutal reminder of how badly we all need that sense of belonging.

We know we have much in common with Trump's voters; most of us know and love some people who don't share our politics. We even share political concerns with some who voted in ways we find inexplicable; many have voted differently in past elections — even for Bernie Sanders in 2016 or 2020 — and embrace some left ideas and feelings. We share with many of them a desire for a better standard of living for the working class and a desire to live in a world without war. Let's leave hatred of our fellow Americans to the billionaires; when we're divided, they're the only winners.

We socialists can do better than Trump. We bring to the world that sense of collective love we call solidarity, what Sanders calls that willingness to "fight for someone you don't know." Without that, we can build nothing — and build we must.

— **Liza Featherstone**, *Jacobin* columnist

### ***Eric Blanc: No Easy Answers, Just Organizing***

It's true that COVID-sparked inflation has seriously hurt incumbent administrations worldwide. But this isn't an iron law. Despite having higher inflation than the United States, Mexico reelected its left government because it [delivered big](#) (and communicated well) to working people. Had Joe Biden been able to consistently string together coherent sentences, and had senators Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema not blocked an ambitious Build Back Better agenda, it's not inconceivable that this could have happened here too.

Democrat hacks are going to say Biden's relatively pro-worker domestic policies and appointments failed to deliver the goods electorally. But after decades of Democratic abandonment of working people, these steps were too little, too late.

It'd be wrong, however, to only blame the Democratic Party establishment. The truth is that union officials — with a few notable exceptions — failed to seize an exceptionally favorable opening for unionizing millions in conditions of a tight labor market, a [pro-worker](#) National Labor Relations Board, and youth radicalization. Instead they mostly continued with business as usual, [sitting on billions of dollars](#) of funding that could have been used to launch and support wide-scale unionization initiatives. Turning around decades of class dealignment and atomization will take a lot of ambitious, bottom-up organizing — and [digitally enabled persuasion](#) — year-round.

— **Eric Blanc**, *Jacobin* contributor

### ***Chris Maisano: The Left Can Still Win Over Trump Voters***

Many Americans feel like things are generally “out of control,” whether that's the cost of living or migration or global instability, and they are looking for a strong hand to protect them — and are therefore willing to overlook everything else that comes with a Donald Trump presidency. He successfully seized on these anxieties to cast first Joe Biden, then Kamala Harris, as the chaos candidate in 2024. Trump convinced enough voters that a vote for him, of all people, is a vote for stability in a dangerous world.

It was a brazen strategy, and by all rights it should not have succeeded. But our political system only offers a binary choice for president; many people are deeply dissatisfied with the current state of affairs; and Biden and Harris were the ones in the White House. So here we are.

Of course, nothing Trump nor the GOP offer will do anything to address the roiling discontents in this country. Trump promised voters that “inflation will vanish completely” if they elected him, but raising tariffs and deporting immigrant workers will only stoke it. The electoral tide can be turned. But the Left, broadly speaking, has to figure out — quickly — how to sink durable organizational roots in communities where we're currently absent, to speak credibly and effectively to people's daily struggles, and to renew faith in the power of collective action. Even the most finely honed campaign appeals to “populism” or “class politics” may not click if people aren't in organizations that continually generate and reinforce solidarity.

There is no easy answer, no messaging breakthrough to save us. Just dogged organizing work in the face of powerful headwinds.

— **Chris Maisano**, contributing editor

### ***Anton Jäger: Without a Net***

As someone with no American citizenship or voting rights, it inevitably feels silly and vicarious to have pronounced opinions about a presidential cycle that has mainly globalized itself through US soft power. Apparently, it was no different in the time of British empire — foreigners eagerly followed the twists and turns of the British parliamentary cycle for the effects it would have on imperial policy. Today the externalities of American politics remain lethal abroad, and the corresponding weakness of the US left is increasingly a European problem: the Americanization of European politics implies rightward drifts and an increasing inability to articulate independent foreign policy positions.

The results at least vindicate some left-wing readings. This was a materialist election about inflation.

Without a proper social safety net, individual purchasing power is Americans' only guarantee for economic stability, and anyone (even wrongly) suspected of overheating the economy will be duly punished for it.

The scale of the Democratic defeat does call for some deeper introspection. For the DNC elite, after all, defeat always remains relative: funding was secured, stars were courted, and the base can be frightened into submission for the coming four years. For those who hoped that a Harris victory could at least leave oxygen to America's fledgling left, the prospects are far more ominous. It might seem tedious to resuscitate discussions about "[surrogate parties](#)," "[dirty breaks](#)," or left-wing caucuses today, but after eight years of MAGA-cum-"MAGA for thinking people" (as Adam Tooze referred to Bidenomics), there is more benefit of hindsight.

— **Anton Jäger**, *Jacobin* contributor

### ***Nick French: The Democratic Party Refuses to Change***

In the wake of Donald Trump's decisive victory on Tuesday, many on the Left are rightly taking the Harris campaign to task for not running a more populist campaign and for failing to give specifics about how she would improve voters' lives on bread-and-butter issues. Fair. But it's unclear whether that sort of campaign would have been enough to put Harris over the top. Given her association with an extremely unpopular president, with a widely hated inflationary economy, and with the ongoing US-backed genocide, rebranding as a populist "change" candidate would have been a tall order.

Part of the blame for Harris's loss lies with the Biden administration itself, which, for reasons partly due to constraints beyond its control and partly of its own making, oversaw a [milquetoast progressivism](#) on the domestic front and a hawkish foreign policy against China and in the Middle East. Prominent left-wing and labor leaders, rightly afraid of the consequences of a Trump presidency, rallied behind the Harris campaign, at times even presenting her as a pro-worker champion. That message rang hollow.

The weeds of Trumpian politics grow in the soil of an increasingly cynical, atomized culture, one where working-class men and women of all races rightly look in disgust at the juxtaposition of a dire cost-of-living crisis, obscene wealth inequality, and self-satisfied elite paeans to "diversity" and "equity." A more fertile environment for left-wing politics will be created by rebuilding grassroots institutions like unions that generate the [bonds of trust and solidarity](#) needed to sustain democracy. It will be created by a collective political project that working-class people can see meaningfully improving their lives and attacking the indignities of today's grossly unequal America, something on the order of a New Deal or a national wartime mobilization.

The Democrats have failed to do these things, and despite this crushing loss and all the misery that will come in its wake, there's no indication the party will try to do them anytime soon.

— **Nick French**, associate editor

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• *Jacobin*. 11.07.2024:  
<https://jacobin.com/2024/11/trump-president-2024-election-left>