

US Elections : It's Happening Again

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And until Democrats can find a way to win back some large chunk of working-class voters, Donald Trump's successors will be favored in the next presidential election too.

Former president Donald Trump arrives at his campaign rally at the Bojangles Coliseum on July 24, 2024, in Charlotte, North Carolina. (Brandon Bell / Getty Images)

"It is happening again." This morning, with Donald Trump in command of another crushing presidential victory, the dreadful words from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* sit like lead inside many stomachs. As the climax of a frenzied campaign and the triumph of so much that is vicious and corrosive in American society, Trump's second election comes as a shock. And yet, as an event in contemporary history, it can hardly be seen as a surprise.

First and most prosaic, there is inflation. Did America really elect a dictator because Frosted Flakes hit \$7.99 at the grocery store ? Read that sentence again and it doesn't sound so absurd.

At a deeper level, 2024 has taught us a hard lesson : in a global society defined by consumption rather than production, voters loathe price increases and are ready to punish rulers who preside over them. Across the biggest election year in modern history, with billions voting worldwide, incumbents have taken a beating, left, right, and center : the Tories in Britain, Emmanuel Macron in France, the African National Congress in South Africa, Narendra Modi's BJP in India, Kirchnerism in Argentina last fall. Today post-pandemic inflation, aggravated by wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, has claimed the scalp of yet another incumbent government.

In America, the Democrats' position was doubly dire. Across the last decade, the defining pattern of national politics has been class dealignment : a vast migration of working-class voters away from the Democratic Party, matched by a flood of professional-class voters away from the Republicans. This was [the decisive factor in 2016](#), when Hillary Clinton was toppled by the same Rust Belt proletarians who had elected Barack Obama. And it continued, more quietly but with unchecked motion, in the years when Democrats made up for their losses by winning more suburban professionals, in [2018](#), [2020](#), and [2022](#).

Kamala Harris's campaign was an embodiment of this shift. She herself ran a cautious but mostly competent race, moving to the right on the border, as voters seemed to demand, pummeling Trump on abortion, and — at least in her [paid messages](#) — wooing working-class voters with a [bread-and-butter focus](#). But in the end, these narrow tactical decisions were overwhelmed by the altered nature of the Democratic Party as a whole.

Even as Harris herself tried to avoid the toxic identity politics of Hillary 2016, she was overtaken by the "shadow party" — a constellation of NGOs, media organizations, and foundation-funded activists who now constitute the Democrats' institutional rank and file. Thus "White Dudes For Harris" and its kindred, the effort to promote Never Trump Republicans in media, and the embarrassing attempts to win over black men with promises of legal marijuana and protections for crypto investments. These shadow party interventions in the race helped raise historic sums of money —

over [\\$1 billion](#) in just a few months — but also marked Harris as the property of an educated professional class, focused entirely on “democracy,” abortion rights, and personal identity but largely uninterested in material questions.

In the last weeks of the campaign, Harris clearly pivoted in the same direction. At rallies and in interviews, she zeroed in on Trump himself as a deadly threat to America’s existing institutions. She barnstormed the swing states with Liz Cheney, labeling Trump’s verbal attack on Cheney as a “disqualifying” incident. In her final tour of the Midwest, she paused her own speeches to put Trump clips on the Jumbotron, seeming to believe that the former president would somehow defeat himself with his own words.

It worked, in the sense that Harris won voters with college degrees by [15 points](#), a larger margin than in 2020. Voters making over \$100,000 a year swung toward the Democrats in record numbers. The moderate Republicans in the suburbs, famously invoked by Chuck Schumer eight years ago, keep trickling into the Democratic coalition. It seems to serve them well enough in the midterms but not so much in the big-ticket contests. This year, the Liz Cheney Democrats were dwarfed by a vast working-class swing toward Trump, in many flavors : rural voters, low-income voters, Latino voters, and black male voters, from Texas to New Hampshire. Even as progressive pundits hailed the post-*Dobbs* gender gap, boasting that Republicans had ruined themselves with female voters for a generation, non-college-educated women [swung](#) toward Trump by 6 points.

Above all, Harris and the Democrats failed to reach voters who have a negative view of the economy — not just Republican partisans but [two-thirds](#) of yesterday’s electorate. With her modest bundle of targeted economic initiatives, joined occasionally to a [half-hearted populist rhetoric](#), is it a surprise that she failed to convince these frustrated voters ? Almost 80 percent of the voters who listed the economy as their top issue cast a ballot for Trump. How much can a few months of targeted advertising do, compared to a broader Democratic shadow party that has been trumpeting the health of the economy — low unemployment, wage growth, and a booming stock market — for over a year now ? If voters did not believe that Harris had a real plan to make their lives better, materially, it is hard to fault them.

Finally, it is only fair to add that Harris faced a uniquely difficult task in this election. For over a year, an already unpopular Democratic president has lacked the physical capacity to communicate with the public. Nevertheless, the shadow party stuck with Joe Biden, propped him up, angrily shouted down any dissenters who questioned whether his political skills — not to mention his judgment, on Israel/Palestine and elsewhere — had entered a terminal decline.

After Biden finally malfunctioned at the debate, it still took Democrats a month to swap him off the ticket. (For all the memes celebrating Nancy Pelosi for her “ruthless” role in this last-minute effort, few bothered to note the fecklessness of the Democratic leadership that had allowed Biden to last that long to begin with.) Harris thus entered the race with a makeshift campaign, already trailing heavily in the polls. Plucked to join the Biden 2020 ticket as a first-term California senator, she herself lacked any experience defeating Republicans in a competitive statewide election.

Between the global hex of inflation, the slow creep of dealignment, and the Biden fiasco, the prospects for a Republican victory in 2024 were always large. Trump himself seemed to recognize this better than the pundit class, running a cavalier campaign that junked much of his rhetorical “populism” for an embrace of billionaire budget cutters like Elon Musk. His arrogance has been rewarded with another term. Like most second terms, it is likely to end in disappointment for his supporters, frittered away in unpopular policy lurches, a rush of scandal, and lots of time on the golf course. But until Democrats can find a way to win back some large chunk of working-class voters, Trump’s successors will be favored in the next presidential election, anyway.

Matt Karp

P.-S.

- Jacobin. 11.06.2024 :

- <https://jacobin.com/2024/11/its-happening-again-trump-election-win>

- Matt Karp is an associate professor of history at Princeton University and a *Jacobin* contributing editor.