

After Trump's victory, Palestinians cannot afford to wait until the next US election

Sunday 10 November 2024, by [BADAWI Samer](#) (Date first published: 7 November 2024).

Palestinians and their allies must build on down-ballot wins, while recognizing the limitations of electoral politics in the face of Israel's genocidal campaign.

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A sign congratulating Former President Donald Trump on his victory in the US presidential election in central Jerusalem, November 7, 2024. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

In the weeks leading up to Tuesday's U.S. presidential election, I exchanged daily voice messages with a close relative in Lebanon who had fled her home soon after the Israeli army began leveling entire buildings with American weapons. That these arrived courtesy of a Biden-Harris administration that had already sunk more than [\\$22 billion](#) into Israel's "war of self-defense" — [straining](#) even the Pentagon's resources — had long since alienated many would-be supporters of the Democratic ticket. So when my relative asked what would happen on election day, I told her that many American opponents of Israel's genocidal campaign had chosen to sit out the election or, at most, lend their votes to anyone but Vice President Kamala Harris.

Not long after the first results began rolling in, it became clear that Harris had alienated a significant proportion of what had been the Democrats' base. Among Arab and Muslim Americans, her repeated refusal to break with the Biden administration's unquestioning support of Israel pushed tens of thousands of voters toward Green Party candidate [Jill Stein](#) or even [Donald Trump](#).

Progressives abandoning the Democrats over their ongoing support for Israel certainly wasn't the only factor that swung the election for Trump, or even the most pivotal. For one thing, the president-elect's margin of victory, both in the national popular vote and in states that President Joe Biden had won in 2020, outstripped the number of Democratic voters who had cast "[uncommitted](#)" protest ballots in the spring primaries.

But Harris also did little to galvanize progressives in the last days and weeks of her campaign. Having already doubled down on her record as a California prosecutor and tried to paint herself as a tough-on-immigration candidate, her final pitch to American voters drew on the dubious support of neo-conservatives like Liz Cheney and her father, Dick Cheney, one of the architects of America's disastrous "war on terror."

[A failed electoral strategy](#)

But beyond Harris' decisive loss in the presidential race, several down-ballot contests — especially for seats in the House of Representatives — also pointed to waning support for Israel. In

Pennsylvania, the hotly contested swing state that ultimately tilted the election toward Trump, Pittsburgh's Summer Lee — who has [called](#) Israel's campaign in Gaza a genocide — retained her seat by a large margin. And representatives Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, both outspoken critics of U.S. policy on Israel-Palestine, won easily. (In California, incumbent Dave Min, who survived an AIPAC campaign against him during the spring primary, currently remains neck-and-neck with his Republican rival.)

Congresswomen Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib speak at an event hosted by CAIR-Minnesota in Minneapolis, August 19, 2019. (Brad Sigal/Flickr)

In Michigan, a so-called “blue wall” state home to the country's largest concentration of Arab and Muslim Americans, Tlaib's down-ballot win alongside Harris' loss underscores the Democrats' [failed strategy](#). Although it remains unclear how many of these voters abandoned Harris over her Israel policy or her refusal to allow a Palestinian speaker at the Democratic National Convention, Tlaib's victory showed that a full-throated defense of Palestinian rights need not be a liability.

If anything, getting tougher on Israel could have swayed more voters toward the Democrats. An August [poll](#) by YouGov and the IMEU Policy Project revealed as much, with more than one-third of voters in three swing states indicating that a pledge to withhold weapons to Israel would make them more likely to support a candidate.

In the lead-up to the election, liberal commentators like The New York Times' Nicholas Kristof [recognized](#) that Harris's failure to differentiate herself from Biden on Israel was a major liability. But he still insisted that opponents of Israel's genocidal campaign could not afford what he called “liberal purity.”

No matter the strength of their objections, the thinking went, anti-war protestors were bound to recognize that Trump would be worse; after all, he broke with longstanding policy to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, recognize Israeli “sovereignty” over the Golan Heights, and cut funding to the [UN Relief and Works Agency](#). Kristof and others failed to explain, however, how a return to the Trump era would be significantly worse than a year in which that agency was not only stripped of all U.S. funding but repeatedly targeted with American weapons, killing more than a hundred of its staff and effectively slowing aid to Gaza's 2 million besieged residents to a [trickle](#).

Equally unconvincing is the contention that Trump would give Israel a wider berth to carry out its assault on the people and infrastructure of Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. As the Beirut-based journalist Farah Silvana-Kanaan has [pointed out](#), the “carte blanche” argument is belied by the fact that, under the current administration's watch, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not only faced zero repercussions for his actions, but has enjoyed unlimited material and diplomatic support.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meets with American Senator Kamala Harris from California, at the PM's Office in Jerusalem, on November 20, 2017. (Amos Ben Gershom/GPO)

At the same time, disillusioned Democrats holding out hope that Trump could rein in that support have little indication that any change is afoot. Billionaire Miriam Adelson, a staunch opponent of a Palestinian state, [poured](#) \$100 million into Trump's campaign in its final weeks. And Trump himself made a point of wielding “Palestinian” as a [slur](#) during his campaign.

The incoming president's [reported](#) insistence that Israel end its Gaza assault before January — when the White House changes hands — came with no known conditions, leaving open the possibility that Netanyahu would fast track plans to seize the territory and, with it, wide swaths of the West Bank.

The latter would fulfill what American rabbi Shmuley Boteach, a friend of Adelson's, [has said](#) is a dream of the mega-donor.

The uphill battle for Palestine advocacy

Girding themselves for Trump's second term, some Palestinian allies are redoubling their efforts in the political sphere. In the run-up to the election, Abdullah Hammoud, the Arab-American mayor of Dearborn, Michigan — where more than half the residents are of Middle Eastern descent — [vowed](#) to continue pressing for a change in U.S. policy toward Israel and the wider region, no matter who won the presidential race. In a [post](#) on X following Trump's victory, Hammoud wrote that he would "continue to hold the White House accountable to policies that will save and improve lives."

A Democrat, Hammoud [withheld](#) an endorsement of Harris while also refusing to meet with Trump days before the election. His city, though, [picked](#) Trump over Harris by a 12-point margin, marking an extraordinary shift for a constituency that had been reliably Democrat.

Into this schism, two former senior Democratic officials, Josh Paul and Tareq Habash, who both resigned from the outgoing administration over its Israel policy, have launched an organization called A New Policy. According to its [website](#), the group's political action committee "supports candidates for federal office who seek to support a new U.S. policy toward the Middle East." But finding those candidates, especially after a year in which the pro-Israel lobby [boasted](#) of securing hundreds of wins across the country, may be a tall order.



Donald Trump speaking at the annual AIPAC policy conference in, Washington, D.C. on March 21, 2016. (Lorie Shaull/CC BY-SA 2.0)

For the few who survived the lobby's onslaught, like Lee of Pennsylvania, whether the new PAC can help fend off pro-Israel spending in future elections may matter less than the Palestine solidarity movement's ability to keep Israel's actions — along with their cost to human lives and the international legal order — in the public spotlight. As the University of Chicago's Eman Abdelhadi [told](#) +972 Magazine before the election, "American society will have to divest from Israel before [its] leaders do."

That, too, is likely to remain an uphill battle during Trump's second term. As reported by [Drop Site News](#), Project 2025 — widely regarded as the incoming administration's policy playbook — includes plans to "dismantle" what Trump supporters have called a " Hamas support network" in the United States. With hundreds of Palestine advocates already [targeted](#) for their activism over the last year and student movements gagged by university administrators, it's hard to see how the protests that animated campuses and many American cities in the last year can carry the same vigor into a second Trump term.

On the other hand, if the primary ambition of that protest movement was to end Israel's genocidal campaign in Gaza, looking beyond the past year's tactics might offer insights into why they have failed — and, perhaps, point to a new way forward.

Long before this presidential election, some American activists were already trying to come to terms with the movement's shortcomings. In May, a group of activists in northeast Ohio issued an [anonymous letter](#) "offering a critical analysis of the campus based movement in solidarity with Palestine." The letter said some student groups were too quick to negotiate with university administrators and police while exposing the most vulnerable protestors, like unhoused and undocumented people, to "far greater risk of harm."

Assessments of the protest movement have also questioned how its priorities — and, by extension, its messaging — were set. Much of this comes down to the challenge of political representation, with the aims of the Uncommitted movement or national groups like A New Policy diverging from those of many campus activists, for example.

Too often missing in these inventories are the voices of the very people most directly threatened by Israel's genocidal campaign. What, if not futile, should the pursuit of electoral politics seem to the Palestinians of Gaza or their counterparts under fire in the West Bank or Lebanon? "While people are watching the U.S. elections, we in North Gaza can hear heavy shelling and U.S.-sponsored bombs being dropped on us," Gaza-based Al Jazeera correspondent Hossam Shabat [posted](#) on X as the vote counts rolled in. "Remember, whoever wins, they are all war criminals."

Such critiques seem particularly incisive and necessary in this moment, and so too are [calls](#) to keep up mutual aid efforts for Palestinians struggling to survive Israel's onslaught. After all, for the millions of people whose fate hinges on where Israel's U.S.-made weapons fall, making sense of what comes next is more than an analytical exercise; it could mean the difference between life and death. It's also why waiting until America's next election cycle is not an option.

Now that this one is over, my relative is no less clear on when — or if — she might return to her home, which has so far been spared in the bombing. The truth is, though, that a Harris win would have lent no more clarity.

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P.S.

- +972. November 7, 2024:
<https://www.972mag.com/trump-victory-us-elections-palestinian-rights/>
- Samer Badawi has been a contributor to +972 Magazine since 2014.
- Our team has been devastated by the horrific events of this latest war – the atrocities committed by Hamas in Israel and the massive retaliatory Israeli attacks on Gaza. Our hearts are with all the people and communities facing violence.

We are in an extraordinarily dangerous era in Israel-Palestine. The bloodshed unleashed by these events has reached extreme levels of brutality and threatens to engulf the entire region. Hamas' murderous assault in southern Israel has devastated and shocked the country to its core. Israel's retaliatory bombing of Gaza is wreaking destruction on the already besieged strip and killing a ballooning number of civilians. Emboldened settlers in the West Bank, backed by the army, are seizing the opportunity to escalate their attacks on Palestinians.

This escalation has a very clear context, one that +972 has spent the past 13 years covering: Israeli society's growing racism and militarism, the entrenched occupation, and an increasingly normalized siege on Gaza.

We are well positioned to cover this perilous moment - but we need your help to do it. This terrible period will challenge the humanity of all of those working for a better future in this land. Palestinians and Israelis are already organizing and strategizing to put up the fight of their lives.

Can we count on your [support](#)? +972 Magazine is the leading media voice of this movement, a desperately needed platform where Palestinian and Israeli journalists and activists can report on and analyze what is happening, guided by humanism, equality, and justice. Join us.

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