

ly to win any of them. And the Democrats' so-called "blue wall" crumbled with Harris trailing Trump in Michigan and losing outright in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Harris and her campaign hoped to win the White House by bringing over moderate Republican and independent voters fed up with nearly a decade of division in the era of Donald Trump.

Yet the Democratic nominee lost the election in large part because she was unable to prevent core Democratic constituencies — Black, Latino, and young voters — from splintering.

Harris underperformed with voters of color — particularly Latino voters — but also Black voters in urban centers such as Philadelphia, Detroit, and Milwaukee. Despite maintaining Democrats' growing strength in college-educated suburbs, it was not enough to overcome Trump's gains in Democratic strongholds.

Harris carried Black voters 86%-12% and Latino voters 53%-45%, according to CNN exit polls. But in the 2020 election, Biden won Black voters by a wider 92%-8% margin over Trump and Latinos 65%-32%. Meanwhile, Harris worked to limit the bleeding in heavily Republican rural counties in states like Pennsylvania, but she ultimately underperformed Biden in 2020 in these places, returning to the levels Clinton got in 2016.



**Did Harris focus too much on Trump?**

From the beginning, Harris tried to make the race a referendum on Trump.

In the final weeks of the campaign, Harris escalated her rhetoric, calling the former president a fascist, warning that he is "unhinged and unstable," and highlighting the assessment of Trump's former White House chief of staff, John Kelly, who alleged Trump made past admiring statements about Adolf Hitler.

She increasingly leaned into

framing the election as a fight for democracy, much like Biden did before he dropped out of the race in 2024.

"Kamala Harris lost this election when she pivoted to focus almost exclusively on attacking Donald Trump," veteran pollster Frank Luntz said on X, formerly Twitter. "Voters already know everything there is about Trump — but they still wanted to know more about Harris' plans for the first hour, first day, first month, and first year of her administration."

"It was a colossal failure for her

campaign to shine the spotlight on Trump more than on Harris' own ideas," Luntz said.

Harris, who campaigned aggressively on restoring abortion access, won female voters by a sizable 54%-44% margin, according to CNN exit polls, but it was a slimmer margin than Biden's 57%-42% performance with women in 2020. Trump won male voters over Harris by the same 54%-44% margin as Harris won women.

The abortion issue ended up not being the galvanizing force it was in 2022 when Democrats

exceeded expectations in the midterms.

Harris' loss marks the second time in three election cycles that Democrats have fielded a female presidential candidate in hopes of making history — only to both times lose to Trump.

**Democrats have plenty to second-guess**

Harris was an unproven political commodity outside of California, ending her 2020 Democratic primary bid before voting got started. She secured the Democratic

Supporters react to election results as they attend an election night event for US Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris at Howard University in Washington, DC, on November 5, 2024. ● AFP

nomination this time without receiving a single vote as Democrats quickly rallied around her following Biden's exit. She tried to distance herself from some of the liberal positions she took as a 2020 Democratic primary candidate in an appeal to Republicans and moderates.

At the same time, polling consistently showed Americans held fonder memories today of Trump's four years in office — particularly his leadership of the economy — than they did when he was in the White House. Many Americans were willing to forgive Trump's well-documented baggage: four criminal indictments, two impeachments, and his role in the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

Most voters, 51%, said they favored Trump over Harris to handle the economy, which 31% of voters cited as their top issue, according to CNN's exit polls.

For Democrats, the second-guessing has now begun: Was Harris the right choice to take on Trump? Should they have looked elsewhere? Or should they have stuck with Biden?

The article first appeared on USA Today.

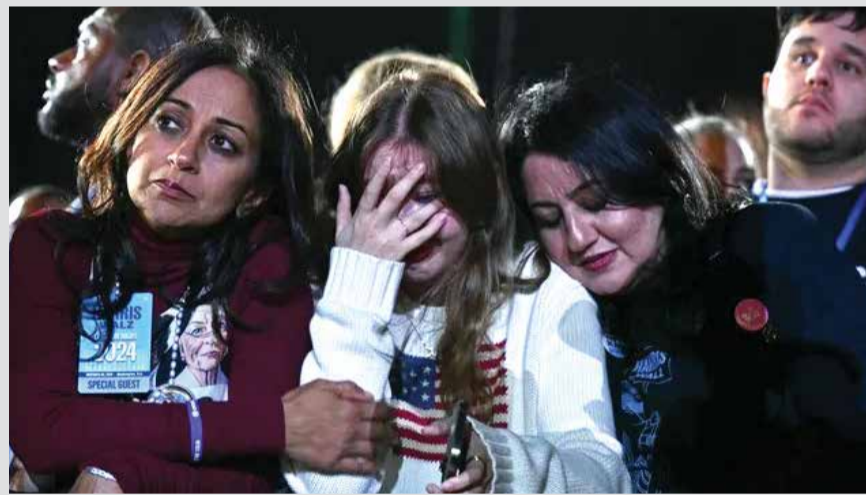
# Why Kamala Harris lost

By Andrew Prokop  
Reporter  
**PERSPECTIVE**

Four years after Donald Trump tried to steal the 2020 election and left office in disgrace, the American people returned him to power in the 2024 election.

Major news outlets called most of the major swing states — North Carolina, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin — for Trump late Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning, giving him an Electoral College majority. The trend was broader than the swing states; there was a shift toward Trump across the nation, as he significantly improved on his performance in the 2020 election.

Trump's win will come with a new Republican Senate majority, as Democratic incumbents lost in Ohio and Montana. How did this happen?



Supporters of Vice US President Kamala Harris look troubled as election results come in during an event at Howard University in Washington, DC, on November 5, 2024. ● ANGELA WEISS/AFP

The blame game among Democrats will come fast and furious. But though the Harris campaign's strategy is sure to be second-guessed, the extent and nationwide nature of the shift in Trump's favor suggest she had an uphill battle all around — because of the widespread unpopularity of President Joe Biden and public disapproval of his record in office. Harris inherited a tough situation from Biden — and ultimately could not overcome it.

When Harris unexpectedly joined the presidential race in July after Biden stepped aside, she faced three formidable obstacles.

The first was a global trend: In the years since the pandemic, incumbent parties have been struggling in wealthy democracies across the world. The reasons for this are debated, though post-reopening inflation is likely a big one. But to win, Harris would have to defy this trend.

The second was Biden's unpopularity. The president was historically unpopular long before his disastrous debate with Trump, and poll after poll showed voters irate with his handling of the economy and immigration. Foreign policy, particularly the Israel-Gaza war that divided Democrats' coalition, was a problem too. And since Harris had served in his administration as vice president, she had to figure out what to do about that.

Typically, such dynamics would seem to point to a "change" election where the incumbent party is booted. In such elections, the opposition can often put the blame for the current state of affairs on the incumbents, make vague promises that they'll do things differently, and ride to victory.

Yet there was nothing typical about Harris' opponent: Donald Trump. The fact that Trump had recently served as president in his own controversial term, with his own controversial record, seemed to present Harris with an opening. Perhaps she could brand herself the change candidate who would deliver a fresh, new approach, breaking from the failed politics of the past.

That brings us to the third obstacle: Harris' own record. While running for president in 2019, Harris embraced a set of very progressive policy positions that Democrats now view as politically toxic, including banning fracking and decriminalizing unauthorized border crossing. So, she had a choice to make: Should she stand by her old positions and promise bold progressive change, or should she tack to the center?

In the end, Harris took a kind of middle path. She downplayed, disavowed, or simply avoided mention of many of the progressive policies she'd supported back in 2019 — but she didn't deliber-

ately pick fights with the left in search of centrist cred, like Bill Clinton did in his 1992 presidential campaign. Harris wanted to keep the Democratic coalition happy, pleasing as many people as she could, rather than taking sides in any factional fights.

In addressing Biden's record, too, Harris tried to strike a balance. She decided not to criticize Biden, throw him under the bus, or break with him — or the Biden-Harris administration's policies — in any significant way. When pressed about voter anger over inflation and unauthorized immigration, she did not acknowledge error. Rather, she tried to argue that the economy was doing well now and blamed Trump for not supporting a bipartisan immigration bill. And she did not shift on Israel-Gaza. Harris's hope was that she'd done enough to present herself as a new

face, and that the fundamental unfitness of Donald Trump — and his unpopular record on issues like abortion and his attempt to steal the 2020 election — would ultimately prove to be decisive to voters disgruntled with both parties.

That hope was in vain. Ultimately, much of the public was more resentful of inflation under Biden than they were about Trump's attempted election theft. And so, voters turned back to the candidate they kicked out of office just four years ago.



The full article first appeared on Vox.

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US President Joe Biden (l) and Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, speak during a campaign event at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Md., on August 15, 2024. ● ERIC LEE/NYT