

Democrats, Data, and Determination

The Hidden Story of Donald Trump's Return

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Foreword

From scandal-ridden candidates to a late swap atop the Democratic ticket to multiple assassination attempts against the Republican nominee, the 2024 election was one of the most storied in American history. Yet with all that hype, the outcome proved rather anticlimactic as Donald Trump cruised to victory, exceeding the predictions of even the most bullish Trump supporters. It's the greatest political comeback in American history. Historians will spend the next few years trying to tell the story of how Trump came back from a disgraceful exit to his first presidency to ascend to his greatest heights yet. This is my attempt to tell that story. In this analysis, I contextualize Trump's moment in the grander scheme of American politics. I weave together past and present, abstract theory and hard data in order to show how we as the United States have reached this moment.

This analysis is as much a reflection on the 2024 election as it is a discussion of our political system, its structures and institutions. I begin this analysis with a discussion of coalitions. Understanding this little bit of theory is necessary before we look at any specific results from this election. The bulk of this analysis is our tour of the states with their election results. Our tour generally begins with noncompetitive states where certain important trends are nevertheless revealed and discussed. I choose not to focus on only the “swing states” because the trends that happen in non-swing states may still be informative of our present political moment and can also be harbingers of future trends to come. I then look at the most critical swing states at length, delving deeply into the mathematics of how, where, and why Trump was able to flip enough votes to win the election. The final third of this analysis is an election post-mortem for the Democratic Party, where I pinpoint what exactly went wrong to bring them to this disastrous defeat. Finally, I conclude this analysis with a discussion of what comes next for both parties.

A note on my data sources: In a few cases, different sources report different vote totals for the same races. I have cross-checked all the numbers with official returns posted by each state's secretary of state, to the best of my ability. Unless otherwise attributed, all figures and images are taken from open-source Wikipedia or are my original work.

Part I: Theoretical Introduction

Chapter 1: Coalitions

The Electoral College has its proponents and its detractors, who each make some valid points and a lot of dubious ones. The most common argument in favor of the Electoral College seems to be some form of “if we didn’t have it, then only large cities would matter”, which by itself is incredibly dubious. The opponent of the Electoral College would respond that if most of the country lives in cities, then they should have the power to elect the president. In my opinion, the strongest argument in favor of the Electoral College is one that’s seldom used: that by tying electoral votes to the states, it forces candidates to forge diverse coalitions of voters across vastly different regions who care about vastly different issues. In practice, a presidential candidate must appeal to many groups in order to win, and those winning coalitions change over time. Based solely on their state demographics and economies, there’s little reason why one would expect Florida and Idaho to vote the same way, or Colorado and Rhode Island. But the two major parties have built coalitions such that the Republican coalition contains voters that form majorities in Florida and Idaho, and the Democratic coalition contains voters that form majorities in Colorado and Rhode Island. This has certainly not always been the case, not even 30 years ago in fact, when Colorado and Idaho voted Republican and Florida and Rhode Island voted Democratic.

A perusal through Electoral College maps of the past 100 years would show that coalitions in recent elections shift far more slowly now than at any other point in the past century. Gone are the days when nearly every election was a 400-electoral vote landslide. No more are half of the states decided within a 10% margin. We’re at a time where you can be sure of how all but 5–10 swing states will vote in every election. This shows that the country became increasingly polarized since the start of the Sixth Party System (1980–2016). First it was the Northeast, which became solidly Democratic in the 1990s as a result of President Clinton’s fiscally conservative policies that favored large corporations while maintaining liberal views on social issues. Then it was the South and the Plains, which became solidly Republican in the 2000s as the Republican Party better reflected their socially conservative views and the

Democratic Party shied away from addressing rural issues in favor of urban ones.¹ Finally, the West became firmly Democratic in the Obama era as he won former bellwether states New Mexico and Nevada by large margins and even managed to turn the formerly Republican state of Colorado into a solid blue state. Of course, some regions have their exceptions (Utah being a red state in the West; Minnesota a blue state on the Plains), but by and large this is where coalitions have settled.

Elections, then, are decided by the few swing states that remain, the states that don't conform to their region's typical demographic profile. In recent elections, that's been Florida and Georgia in the South, Arizona in the West, Wisconsin in the Plains, and Pennsylvania in the Northeast. Then, of course, there's the region that has yet to firmly solidify itself in either party's coalition—the Midwest, especially the industrial Midwestern ("Rust Belt") states of Ohio, Michigan, and even Indiana that have swung both ways in the past five elections. It was these Rust Belt states (Pennsylvania being very much a part as well)² that fueled the transition from Obama to Trump. Even long-time supporters of the Democratic Party were drawn to then-candidate Trump's promise to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States, giving Trump the decisive piece of his winning coalition.

While Trump was redrawing the electoral map to bring the Rust Belt into his coalition, he also alienated many suburban voters away from the Republican Party. Even as Trump flipped six states and 206 counties won twice by Barack Obama,³ he managed to lose six suburban counties (e.g. Orange County, CA; Cobb, Gwinnett, and Henry Counties, GA) that voted for McCain and Romney.⁴ Once the leading component of the Republican coalition, suburban

¹ Contrary to popular belief, the Southern Strategy attempted by Richard Nixon to court white racists to the Republican Party in the aftermath of the Democratic Party's embrace of civil rights did not work. In presidential politics, Democrats continued to win half the Southern states through 1996. Southern Democrats held onto power even longer in state governments, e.g. holding a supermajority in Arkansas's legislature as late as 2010. To this day, Louisiana continues to have more registered Democrats than Republicans.

² Pennsylvania straddles the Midwest and the Northeast, which are separated by the Appalachians. But while Pennsylvania should rightly be considered a core Rust Belt state, the same is not true for Wisconsin, despite the media's frequent grouping of "Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin" as the Rust Belt swing states. Wisconsin's economy was never dependent on manufacturing, and accordingly it never experienced the industrial decline definitional to the Rust Belt. Wisconsin has always been an agricultural state with light, not heavy, industry, making it more similar to Minnesota and Iowa than Michigan and Pennsylvania.

³ Pivot Counties

⁴ Reverse Pivot Counties

voters became a firmly entrenched core of the Democratic coalition by the 2018 midterms, and those aforementioned counties proved vital to Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election.

Strictly speaking, the non-incumbent party does not need to expand its coalition in order to win a presidential election. It can instead win by increasing turnout among its base, or by attracting low-propensity voters. I argue this was the case in 2020, where Trump arguably not only maintained his 2016 coalition, but expanded it by attracting Latino voters in Florida and Texas. Rather, the key to Biden's win was record turnout that saw him exceed the previous nationwide popular vote record by 11.8 million votes. Seeing as Trump also exceeded the previous record by some 4.7 million votes, it was not so much the case that Biden flipped voters who voted for Trump in 2016. It was that Biden won decisively among new voters, located primarily in major cities like Atlanta and Phoenix and their suburbs. In fact, in regions where I suspect many voters changed their preferences from 2016 to 2020, it was in favor of Trump: the aforementioned predominantly Latino counties of South Florida and South Texas.

This may seem to support the popular belief that higher turnout benefits Democrats. It was true in 2020 and makes sense on a theoretical level, as urban areas have more potential voters and have long formed the core of the Democratic coalition. Post-election data from the Census Bureau show that the largest turnout increase from 2016 to 2020 was among young voters, who have historically leaned Democratic. Given their prominent role in the George Floyd protests and the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic, these new voters likely sought change and voted Trump out of office.⁵ But as we'll see in this analysis, it is not generally true that higher turnout benefits Democrats. It is also probably not true, contrary to popular belief and the claims of the Trump campaign, that no-excuse absentee voting or the expansion of mail-in ballots drove the turnout increase, or that it significantly benefited Democrats. While it is true that 2020 had by far the greatest number of absentee voters in any election in American history, a study from Stanford suggests that these voters would have voted in-person even if

⁵ William H. Frey, "Turnout in 2020 election spiked among both Democratic and Republican voting groups, new census data shows," Brookings Institution, May 5, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/turnout-in-2020-spiked-among-both-democratic-and-republican-voting-groups-new-census-data-shows/>.

absentee voting were not an option, with no difference in the effect between Democrats and Republicans.⁶

Ultimately, it is not increased access to voting, but increased political interest, that drives voter turnout. Along with a lack of evidence that it's more susceptible to fraud, these findings seriously call into question Trump's strategy of opposing absentee voting. They also call into question certain Democrats' complaints of voter suppression. Cries that a previous election was "stolen" neither expand a coalition nor encourage new voters to vote. So it should come as no surprise that prominent election deniers like Doug Mastriano, Kari Lake, and Stacey Abrams, who ran on little else than relitigating their or their party's previous defeats, lost their elections in the 2022 midterms.

Given that Biden's win in 2020 was driven primarily by increased turnout and not by an expanded coalition (and that, if anything, Trump's coalition expanded from 2016 to 2020), I argue that Democrats would have come into the 2024 election in a tenuous position even without Biden's unpopularity and the late candidate switch. Democrats were relying on low-propensity voters to once again turn out in massive numbers to defeat Trump. Their one saving grace was that Trump was indeed the Republican nominee. Had a more popular Republican who enjoyed broad approval among all parts of Trump's 2016 and 2020 coalitions been leading the ticket, I don't think the outcome of this election would ever have been in doubt. Then again, given Trump's unique ability to turn out his base in the industrial Midwest, I'm not sure such a Republican even exists.

⁶ Jesse Yoder *et al.*, "How did absentee voting impact the 2020 U.S. election?" *Science Advances* 7, no. 52 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abk1755>.

Chapter 2: Nationwide Trends

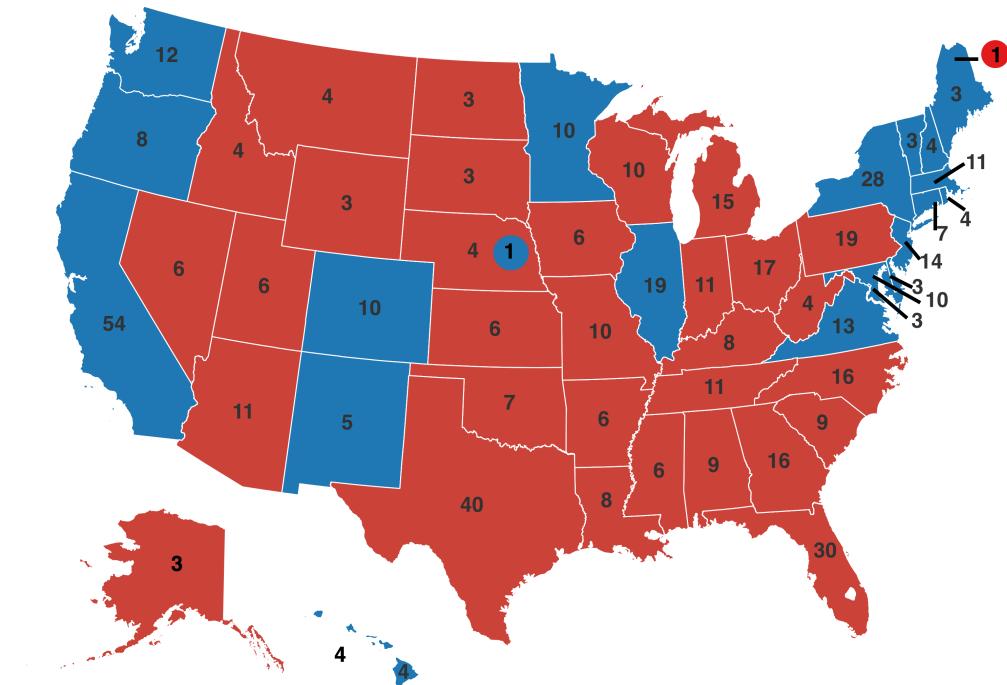


Figure 1: 2024 Presidential Election Results

How close was the 2024 presidential election in comparison to other recent elections? In the nationwide popular vote, Donald Trump received 77.3 million votes to Kamala Harris's 75 million votes. By this metric, Trump's lead of 2.3 million votes makes this the second closest election since 1980, behind only the election of 2000. But the fatal flaw of the popular vote is that it does not actually determine the winner of the election. We can then look to Trump's 312–226 victory in the Electoral College, the result that actually mattered. But how do we interpret this? It's a greater margin of victory than 2020 or 2016, but with the difference being only one small state. Does this mean the 2024 election was similarly close to 2020 and 2016?

You wouldn't think so based on the media's election night coverage, and especially by the Trump team's own pronouncements. And they're right... to some extent. What the Electoral College margin fails to capture is how far away Kamala Harris actually was from winning any additional states. Almost every state allocates its entire slate of electoral votes in a winner-take-all manner to the state's popular vote leader. So the Electoral College margin is masking the margin of victory within each state. In a sense, it *is* actually the popular vote that matters... just within each state, not across the whole nation.

For this reason, I argue that the most accurate way of measuring the closeness of the election is computing the minimum number of votes needed to be removed from the winner (or added to the loser) in order to change the winner of the Electoral College. I demonstrate this using the 2016 and 2020 elections, both of which were decided by a 306–232 electoral vote margin.⁷ In 2016, had Hillary Clinton gained (or Donald Trump lost) 10,704 votes in Michigan; 22,748 votes in Wisconsin; and 44,292 votes in Pennsylvania, then she would have flipped all three states to reach 278 electoral votes and win the election.⁸ This is the smallest possible combination of states that Hillary Clinton needed to flip in order to change the outcome of the election. So we can say that Trump won the 2016 election by $10704+22748+44292=77,744$ votes.

In 2020, Trump would have needed to gain (or Joe Biden lose) 10,457 votes in Arizona; 11,779 votes in Georgia; and 20,682 votes in Wisconsin to reach 269 electoral votes. Since Republicans controlled a majority of state delegations in the House of Representatives, I will consider a 269–269 result a Trump victory by assuming Trump wins the subsequent contingent election (pursuant to the 12th Amendment). This is the smallest possible combination of states that Trump needed to flip in order to change the outcome of the election. So we can say that Biden won the 2020 election by $10457+11779+20682=42,918$ votes. We see that even though the Electoral College margins in 2016 and 2020 were identical, the 2020 election was actually

⁷ Throughout this exercise, I ignore faithless electors for convenience. I expect that any faithless electors would have been replaced had the outcome of the election actually been in question.

⁸ Technically, this would result in ties in all three states. In American elections, ties are usually broken by randomness, so we'll assume that Clinton wins the casting of lots in each state. If you must, feel free to add one vote to each state to achieve a Clinton victory without the tiebreaker.

a bit closer than the 2016 election.⁹

We now apply this process to the 2024 election. To win the election, Kamala Harris would have needed to gain (or Trump lose) 29,397 votes in Wisconsin; 80,103 votes in Michigan; and 120,266 votes in Pennsylvania to reach 270 electoral votes and win the election. This is the smallest possible combination of states that Harris needed to flip in order to change the outcome. So we can say that Trump won the 2024 election by $29397+80103+120266=229,766$ votes. This total is nearly triple that of Trump's 2016 victory, showing that his 2024 win was indeed much more dominant than 2016, despite what the Electoral College margin might suggest.

As it compares against other historical elections, however, we see that Trump's 2024 election victory of 229,766 votes is not especially large. It is smaller than either of Barack Obama's wins, either of Bill Clinton's, and especially any of the Republican landslides of the 1980s.¹⁰ Its best comparison might be Obama 2012, which is generally classified as a decisive victory, but by no means a "landslide".

But what all these measurements miss is movement, the trends from election to election. What really excited Republicans—and frightened Democrats—was not so much the margins by which Trump won, but the increased support he received from seemingly every demographic group and every region across the country. It is the *shift* of voters from election to election that needs to be analyzed.

Donald Trump won the 2024 presidential election with an Electoral College margin of 312 to 226. This represents a swing of 160 electoral votes in favor of Trump from the 2020 election. He also won the popular vote, receiving 77,302,580 votes (49.8%) against Kamala Harris's 75,017,613 votes (48.3%).

⁹ If you don't want to assume Trump wins the contingent election, then Trump would have needed another 22,091 votes from Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District to reach 270, increasing the sum to 65,009. This margin is much more similar to the 2016 margin, but because I don't think it's feasible that Biden could have won a House contingent election, I'm sticking with the former narrative.

¹⁰ Before you accuse this metric's outcomes of being entirely correlated with the Electoral College vote margin, there are some unintuitive results down the line. The 2016 and 2020 elections are both closer than the 2004 election, which Bush won by a smaller Electoral College victory of 286–252. More unintuitively, Bill Clinton's 1996 Electoral College win of 379–159 is more dominant than George H.W. Bush's 1988 win of 426–112.

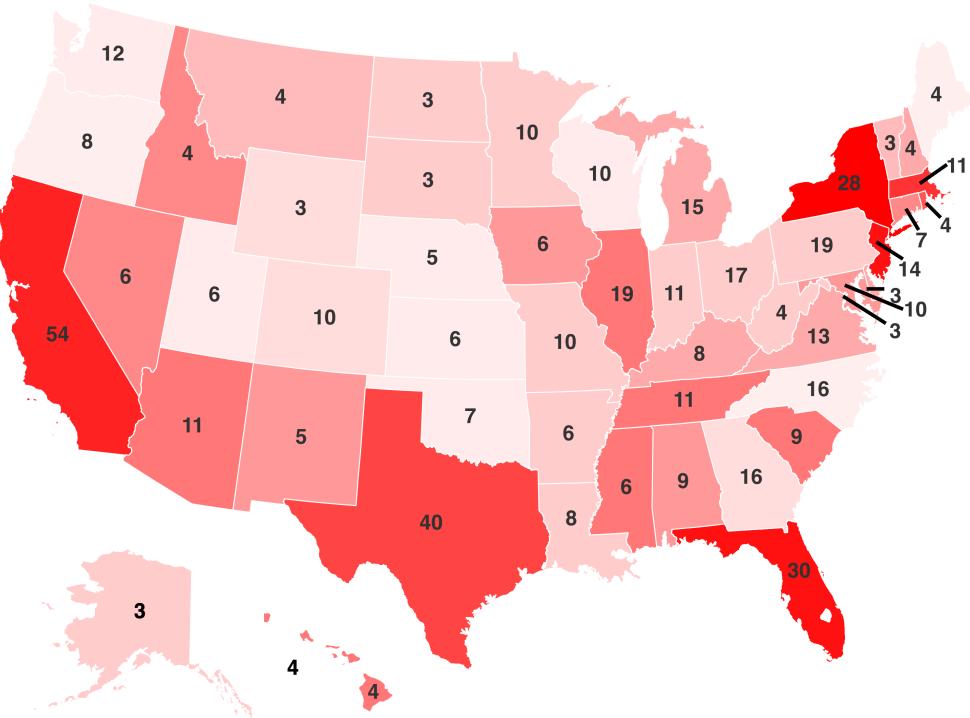


Figure 2: State-by-State Swing from 2020 to 2024

Nationwide Popular Vote Shift from 2020 to 2024

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Swing
Republican	74,224,319 (46.8%)	77,302,580 (49.8%)	+3,078,261 (+3%)
Democratic	81,284,666 (51.3%)	75,017,613 (48.3%)	-6,267,053 (-3%)

Total: Trump +9,345,314 (+6%)

We can see that the total number of votes cast in the 2024 election was lower than the 2020 election, which means a marked decrease in turnout considering that the eligible voting population in the United States is increasing. According to the Florida Election Lab, turnout

was down from [66.4% in 2020](#) to [63.9% in 2024](#). As Democrats should have feared, if not expected, the record turnout that fueled Biden’s 2020 election victory did not materialize for Kamala Harris in 2024. The amount of votes Democrats lost from 2020 to 2024 is more than double the number of votes Trump gained, showing that lower turnout explains most of the nationwide popular vote shift.

But these nationwide data mask variation among the states. There were actually eight states where turnout increased from 2020 to 2024: Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin. Notice that most of these states were considered by the media as “swing states” leading up to the election. While most media outlets listed Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin as the seven swing states, I argued before the election that North Carolina should have been considered a very likely Trump state, and New Hampshire was the true seventh swing state.¹¹ The post-election results back me up on this, as New Hampshire ended up being closer than North Carolina. Thus among the seven “true” swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, six of them saw greater turnout than in 2020; among the forty-three other states, only two of them saw greater turnout.

Not so coincidentally, the six closest states by percentage in this election were Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Georgia, New Hampshire, and Nevada, the six swing states that also saw increased turnout from 2020 to 2024. It seems that more people were motivated to vote in states where the outcome was in doubt. This benefited Harris in particular, since she was hurt much more by the decreased turnout across the rest of the country. Since these states have little in common with each other besides being swing states, I’m inclined to believe that the Harris campaign’s efforts to turn out the Democratic base in swing states were successful. For all the talk in conservative circles of Kamala Harris being a weak candidate, she ultimately didn’t run such a horrible campaign given the unfavorable circumstances. In an election where Republicans were far better organized and more enthusiastic about their candidate, Harris

¹¹ My reasoning was that North Carolina has slowly but surely been becoming more Republican since Obama won it in 2008, while New Hampshire was decided by a <1% margin as recently as 2016.

managed to mobilize within the swing states to at least keep them close, even as Democratic margins shrunk massively in non-swing states like New York and New Jersey. Had a less competent Democrat been leading the ticket (Joe Biden), I would have expected him to lose the “swing states” by far greater margins (say, around 5%), and the true competitive states would have been Virginia, New Jersey, and New Mexico. We’d be observing that Biden managed to save face and avoid a 400-electoral vote landslide by narrowly holding onto Illinois and New York.

All this shows that the nationwide popular vote margin does not adequately capture the voter trends from 2020 to 2024. Differences in turnout require us to analyze state-by-state, county-by-county. I’ll use the adjacent states of Massachusetts and New Hampshire to illustrate. New Hampshire was a swing state, albeit one very unlikely to make a difference in the election with only 4 electoral votes, while Massachusetts was a solid blue state. These two states make for a good comparison because the Greater Boston area straddles both states, setting up a natural experiment of sorts. We can compare voter trends from 2020 to 2024 among the nine counties of the Greater Boston area,¹² and see if they differ between the seven Massachusetts counties and the two New Hampshire counties.

¹² Technically the Providence area, encompassing all of Rhode Island, is also included in the Greater Boston area, but we ignore it for convenience. Several outlying, low-population rural counties in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire are also included in the Census Bureau’s definition of Greater Boston, but I also ignore them.

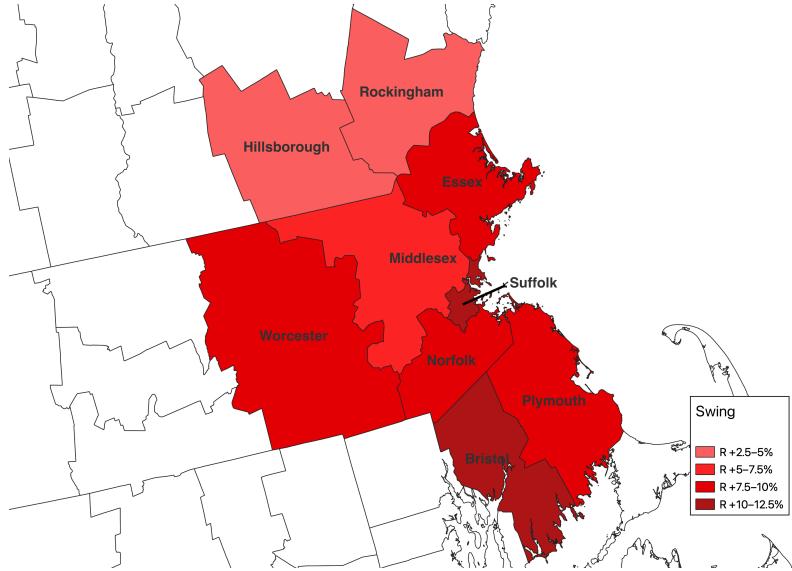


Figure 3: Greater Boston Area Swing

We see that Trump made large gains across the entire Boston megaregion. As we'll see later in this analysis, this was a persistent trend across all the nation's megacities. But his gains appear smaller in the two New Hampshire counties than any of the seven Massachusetts counties, by a lot. Is this what's really happening, or is it that Harris's losses were smaller in the New Hampshire counties than the Massachusetts counties?.

We need to look at exact vote counts, not just percentages, to answer this. To do so we compare two similar counties in the Greater Boston area, one in Massachusetts and one in New Hampshire.¹³ I choose Worcester County, Massachusetts, and Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Although Worcester County is twice as large, the two counties have similar age, education, and racial demographics (both overwhelmingly white), although Hillsborough is a bit wealthier. Worcester County centers around Worcester, a moderately large city of 200,000, but stretches east to include some wealthy exurbs of Boston like Southborough. Hillsborough County centers around New Hampshire's two largest cities of Manchester and Nashua. The similarity between these two counties is not exact, but it will do for this analysis.

¹³ We need to compare similar counties, differing only on their state, in order for this analysis to be valid. Otherwise, it could be other differences between the counties that are causing the change in the outcome.

Worcester County, MA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	171,683 (39.7%)	183,802 (43.7%)	+12,119 (+4%)
Democratic	248,773 (57.6%)	225,680 (53.6%)	-23,093 (-4%)

Total Swing: R +35,212 (+8%)

Hillsborough County, NH

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	104,625 (45.2%)	112,057 (47.8%)	+7,432 (+2.6%)
Democratic	122,344 (52.8%)	118,776 (50.7%)	-3,568 (-2.1%)

Total Swing: R +11,000 (+4.7%)

We see that Trump’s large “gain” in Worcester County can mostly be attributed to falling Democratic turnout; it’s more accurate to describe it as a large Harris loss. But in Hillsborough County, Trump’s smaller gain is truly a gain. While Harris still lost votes in comparison to Biden, it’s not nearly as significant as her loss in Worcester. This shows that Democrats were effective in turning out their base in competitive New Hampshire where they weren’t in noncompetitive Massachusetts. It’s this increase in turnout that kept New Hampshire in the Democratic column even as all the other swing states voted for Trump. Harris holding onto Hillsborough County is particularly impressive, since it had previously voted for the winning candidate in every election since 1992; only seven other “bellwether” counties could say the same heading into 2024.

These trends are generally true throughout the country. The massive popular vote drop-off from Joe Biden to Kamala Harris is mostly driven by a massive drop-off in Democratic turnout, but not so in the swing states. Harris certainly adopted a better campaign strategy

than Hillary Clinton in 2016, who ran ads in noncompetitive Illinois and Louisiana out of fear that she would win the Electoral College while losing the popular vote. Harris's problem? Donald Trump ran an even better campaign.

Chapter 3: Split-Ticket Voting

At this moment, I'm going to take some time to look at down-ballot races. I was tempted to title this section "The Death of Split-Ticket Voting" to reflect that split-ticket voting (i.e. voting for candidates from different parties for different offices in the same election) is now far less common than ever before. But to pundits' joy, there are still a few states, regions even, where split-ticket voting still occurs. New Hampshire and the far Northeast, Northern New England (Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine), is perhaps the most notable such region.

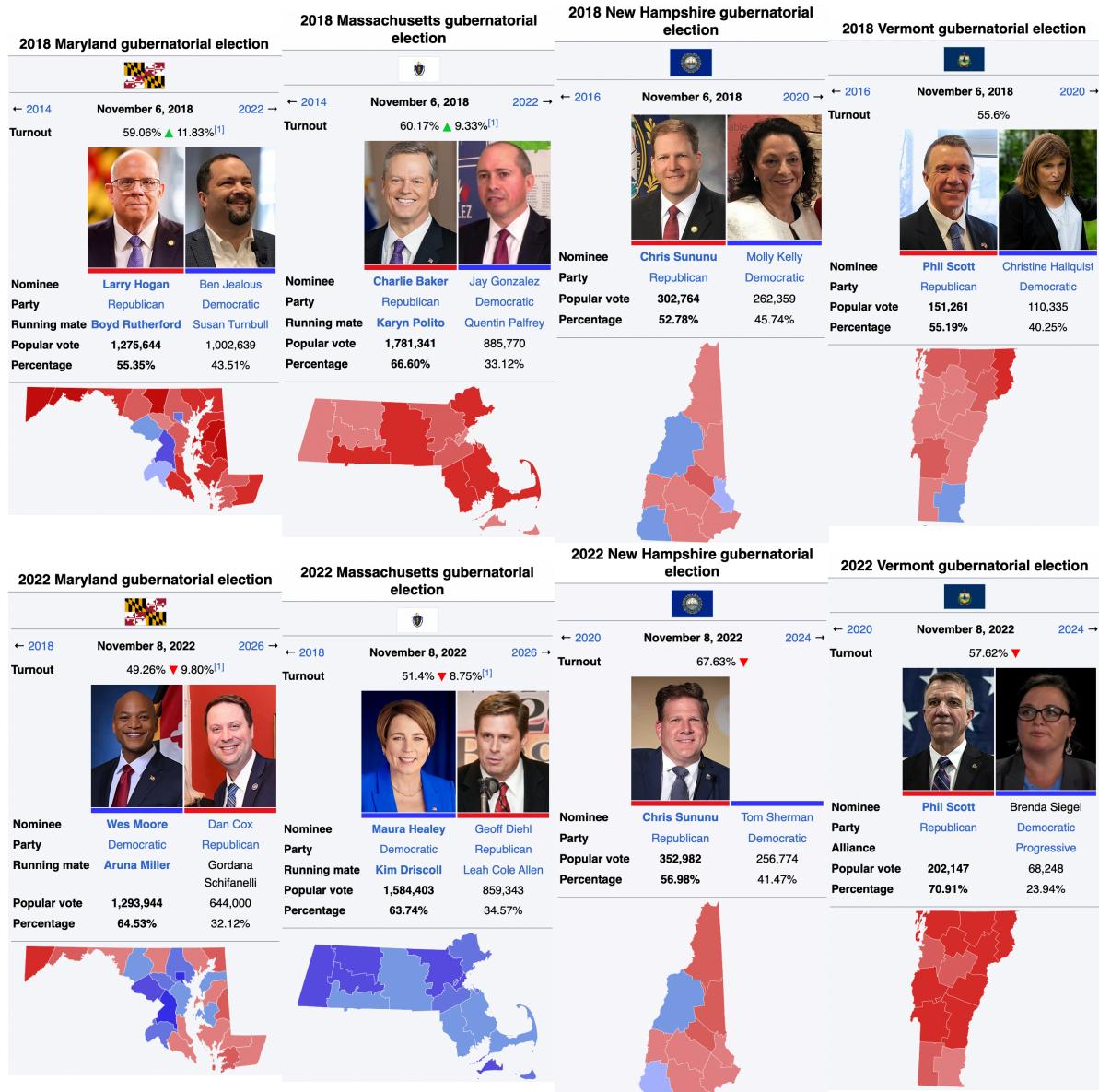
The Northeast used to be a Republican stronghold. Vermont and Maine were the only two states to vote for Landon in 1936. New Hampshire was George H.W. Bush's second strongest state in his 1988 landslide. Since the 1990s, however, this region has become firmly Democratic in presidential politics for the reasons I stated in Chapter 1: the Democratic Party's embrace of neoliberal economics and cultural liberalism. That being said, Republicans continued to win elections for state offices even as these states consistently elected Democrats at the federal level. The best explanation for this is that Northeastern Republicans represent the vestiges of an old Republican Party, in particular the "Eastern Establishment" faction led by Wall Street corporate lawyers: most famously Richard Nixon and Thomas Dewey. These were centrist Republicans (if not left-liberals, even, by the standards of modern politics) who generally supported government intervention in the economy, but not when it came to corporate taxes or challenges to big business. Even as the nationwide Republican Party moved to the right with its embrace of Reaganism, the Eastern Establishment remained alive and well in the Northeast. Think of governors like Bill Weld and Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, George Pataki of New York, and Chris Christie of New Jersey; and New York City Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg. The irony with each of these figures is that even though they governed as liberal or centrist Republicans, they had to completely change (or claim to change) their ideology when they ran for higher office, or else leave the Republican Party entirely. Each of the seven aforementioned Republicans sought the presidency: Christie and Giuliani by embracing the neoconservative moment; Romney and Pataki by presenting themselves as the conservatives they had never been (Governor

Romney, of course, campaigning against Obamacare while brushing aside his signature policy achievement of Romneycare, Obamacare's model); and Chafee and Bloomberg by running as Democrats. Only Bill Weld attempted to run as a traditional center-left Republican (and this only coming after running for vice president as a Libertarian in the previous election). He won a whopping 1 delegate in the 2020 Republican primaries.

Given that none of these Northeastern Republicans ever won a higher office (except Mitt Romney after abandoning both the Northeast and his liberal ideology), it's easy to see why there are now fewer of them in government. In 2018, Republicans were elected governor in Maryland (Larry Hogan), Massachusetts (Charlie Baker), New Hampshire (Chris Sununu), and Vermont (Phil Scott). These are fiscally conservative, culturally liberal Republicans in the tradition of the Eastern Establishment. Hogan was then term limited and Baker declined to run for reelection in 2022, and they were replaced by Democrats (Wes Moore and Maura Healey, respectively). Scott, however, remains governor of Vermont to this day, having been reelected in 2022 and 2024.¹⁴

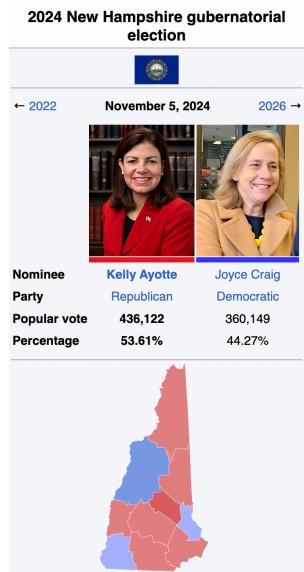
¹⁴ The governors of Vermont and New Hampshire serve two-year terms.

2018 and 2022 Gubernatorial Elections in Maryland, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire



Governor Sununu also won reelection in 2022, but he did not seek reelection in 2024, setting up a competitive election to determine the fate of split-ticket voting in New Hampshire. The Republican Party's failure to remain competitive in Maryland and Massachusetts after Hogan and Baker is largely due to poor candidate nomination, of Trumpists instead of

establishment centrists. In New Hampshire, the Republican nomination went to former Senator Kelly Ayotte, who while not being a stolen-election conspiracy theorist like Dan Cox in Maryland, is still solidly conservative.



New Hampshire President vs. Governor Comparison

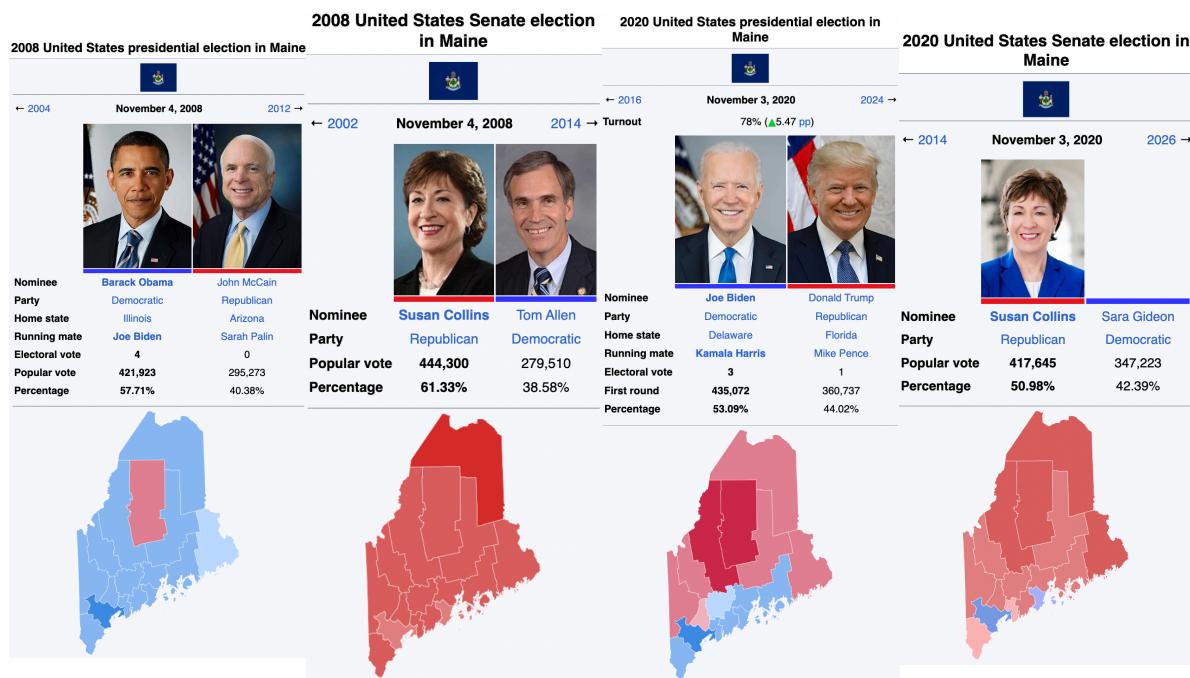
Party	President	Governor	Difference
Republican	395,523 (47.9%)	436,122 (53.6%)	+40,599 (+5.7%)
Democratic	418,488 (50.7%)	360,149 (44.3%)	-58,339 (-6.4%)

Total Difference: Ayotte +98,938 (+12.1%)

At least for the moment, New Hampshire voters continue to split their tickets in sufficient numbers to elect a Republican governor, one much more conservative than other recent Northeastern governors. It helps that New Hampshire is by far the least Democratic state in the Northeast. I doubt that a candidate similar to Ayotte could win an election in any other Northeastern state.

Even at its peak in the 1990s and 2000s, split-ticket voting in the Northeast was generally confined to state offices and not to Congressional elections. Maine has been the sole exception to this trend, having elected exclusively Republican and independent Senators since 1988, and by landslide margins. Even in 2020, as Joe Biden carried the state by 9%, incumbent Republican Susan Collins was reelected to a fifth term with a 9% margin of her own. This was a shocking result at the time, making Maine the only state to elect a Senator from a different party than its presidential vote winner.

Maine President vs. Senate Comparison, 2008 and 2020



2008

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	295,273 (40.4%)	444,300 (61.3%)	+149,027 (+20.9%)
Democratic	421,923 (57.7%)	279,510 (38.6%)	-142,412 (-19.1%)

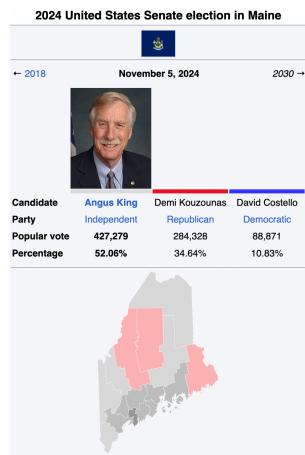
Total Difference: Collins +291,439 (+40%)

2020

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	360,737 (44%)	417,645 (51%)	+56,908 (+7%)
Democratic	435,072 (53.1%)	347,223 (42.4%)	-87,849 (-10.7%)

Total Difference: Collins +144,757 (+17.7%)

Susan Collins's continuing electoral success in Maine despite Republican woes elsewhere in the Northeast is certainly due in large part to her centrist, fiscally conservative but socially liberal views that match the ideology of her voters. But another important trend is Maine's independent voters, who are not only truly independent in voter registration but also in how they vote.¹⁵ While the Senate currently has two unaffiliated Senators, one of them (Bernie Sanders of Vermont) receives the endorsement of the Democratic Party. Only Angus King of Maine wins his elections as a true independent without the backing of either major party. In 2024, Senator King won reelection to a third term while running against both a Republican and a Democrat.



¹⁵ That being said, independent voter registration is [declining](#).

With King's victory, Maine is now one of only three states with a split Senate delegation, alongside swing states Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. With red-state Democrats retiring or losing their reelection bids in Montana, Ohio, and West Virginia, polarization is at its highest since the direct election of Senators began in 1913.¹⁶ Barring a major realignment in American politics, I don't see this trend of polarization changing in the near future. Even though Susan Collins and Phil Scott show that centrist/liberal Republicans can still win elections in blue states, there is little incentive for younger Republicans to adopt such an ideology, given their failures to win higher office. The only Northeastern establishment Republican whose career has gone anywhere after leaving office is Mitt Romney, and that was only after he left the Northeast.

While the death of split-ticket voting hurts Republicans in the Northeast, it's actually Democrats who have been hurt more nationwide. I discuss this in Part III.

¹⁶ Eric Ostermeier, "119th Congress Smashes Record Low for Number of Split US Senate Delegations," Smart Politics, November 19, 2024, <https://smartpolitics.lib.umn.edu/2024/11/19/119th-congress-smashes-record-low-for-number-of-split-us-senate-delegations/>.

Part II: Tour of the States

Chapter 4: Where Harris Did Well

Having established a strong theoretical background, we are now ready to take a deep dive into the 2024 election results. There are very few areas, either geographic or demographic, in which Kamala Harris performed better than Joe Biden. She performed worse in all 50 states and became the first major-party candidate to fail to flip a single county since Herbert Hoover in 1932. That being said, there were still a small minority of counties where she did better, both in competitive states and in non-competitive states alike. My preferred metric for measuring change from 2020 to 2024 is the difference in margin of victory, in terms of total votes. I prefer total votes to percentages because it's actual voters who vote, not percentages. Difference in margin of victory in terms of percentage is too unstable for low-population counties. On the other hand, I prefer using the difference in margin of victory by percentage to measure where the *smallest* changes occur. This is because the smallest changes by total votes are almost always going to come from the smallest jurisdictions. The smallest change by total votes of any state between 2020 and 2024 was Wyoming... simply because it has the fewest total voters. That doesn't make for interesting analysis.

There were no states where Harris did better than Biden, but the states where she most minimized her losses were Utah and Washington, only faring 1% worse in each state.

Utah

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	865,140 (58.2%)	883,818 (59.4%)	+18,678 (+1.2%)
Democratic	560,282 (37.7%)	562,566 (37.8%)	+2,284 (+0.1%)

Total Swing: R +16,394 (+1.1%)

In Utah, not only did she receive more votes than Biden, but she also received a greater percentage of the total vote. These results are due to third-party candidates collectively performing far worse in 2024 than in 2020. Robert Kennedy Jr. was not on the ballot in Utah, and my guess is that a large share of would-be Kennedy voters voted for Trump. The largest swing of any Utah county in favor of Harris came in Davis County, which contains the northern suburbs and exurbs of Salt Lake City. Its swing of 5,326 votes toward Harris gives it the fourth-largest such swing of any county in the nation.

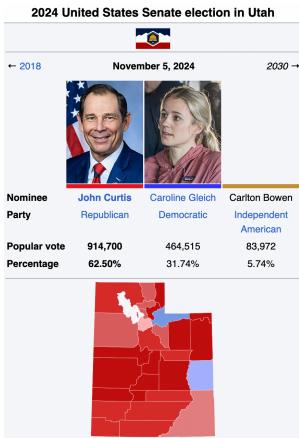
Davis County, UT

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	104,135 (61.3%)	101,293 (60.8%)	-2,842 (-0.5%)
Democratic	57,411 (33.8%)	59,895 (36%)	+2,484 (+2.2%)

Total Swing: D +5,326 (+2.7%)

With its high share of religious voters who value personal character and morals that Trump obviously lacks, it makes sense that Trump performs worse than generic Republicans in Utah.¹⁷ In the concurrent Senate election, John Curtis received 30,000 more votes than Trump and outpaced him by 9%.

¹⁷ David Condos, “US states largely shifted right to meet Trump. Utah stood pat,” KUER, November 6, 2024, <https://www.kuer.org/politics-government/2024-11-06/us-states-largely-shifted-right-to-meet-trump-utah-stood-pat>.



Utah President vs. Senate Comparison

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	883,818 (59.4%)	914,700 (62.5%)	+30,882 (+3.1%)
Democratic	562,566 (37.8%)	464,515 (31.7%)	-98,051 (-6.1%)

Total Difference: Curtis +128,933 (+9.2%)

But Utah is a unique state that Trump has never performed especially well in compared to other Republicans; its religious demographics make it ungeneralizable to any other state or even region in the country aside from Eastern Idaho. To find a region where Harris outperformed Biden from which we can draw meaningful, generalizable conclusions, we stay in the West and look to the Pacific Northwest coast, to Clallam County, Washington. Heading into the 2024 election, Clallam County was the bellwether county with the longest streak of voting for the winner, doing so in every election since 1976. But this streak ended in 2024 as it broke for Harris by 7.8%.

Clallam County, WA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	23,062 (46.8%)	21,632 (44.5%)	-1,430 (-2.3%)
Democratic	24,721 (50.2%)	25,440 (52.3%)	+719 (+2.1%)

Total Swing: D +2,149 (+4.4%)

Clallam County is truly a purple county, one where Democrats and Republicans equally have their strongholds. It's located on the northern tip of the Olympic Peninsula, the gateway to Olympic National Park and connected to Canada by ferry. Its rural western half is strongly Republican, while its more populous eastern half, home to the county's two largest towns of Port Angeles and Sequim, leans Democratic. This diversity (adjacency might be more precise) has enabled it to keep a bellwether status despite the polarization of the nation. But its streak ended in 2024, which I believe is largely due to population changes. The rural, conservative parts of the county and of the Pacific Northwest as a whole are losing population, while the small towns up and down the coast are growing due to retirees seeking Washington's cool, oceanic climate.¹⁸ In general, population movement is the cause behind most shifts in favor of Harris this election. For as few places as there are where she outperformed Biden at all, only a small proportion of those places can be attributed to an expanding coalition as opposed to population movement. Of course, the problem with population movement is that a vote gained in one county or state is a vote lost in another. Population movement alone may be turning Colorado into a solid blue state, but it's also turning Tennessee into a solid red state.

¹⁸ Lauren Gallup, "The last bellwether standing: Clallam County," Northwest Public Broadcasting, September 3, 2024, <https://www.nwpb.org/2024/09/03/the-last-bellwether-standing-clallam-county/>.

Washington

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	1,584,651 (38.8%)	1,530,923 (39%)	-53,728 (+0.2%)
Democratic	2,369,612 (58%)	2,245,849 (57.2%)	-123,763 (-0.8%)

Total Swing: R +70,035 (+1%)

Yet even as Clallam County and Washington's westernmost coastal counties shifted left, the state as a whole still moved to the right by a modest 1%. Trump's gains in Washington are entirely attributable to the Greater Seattle area, the state's urban core.

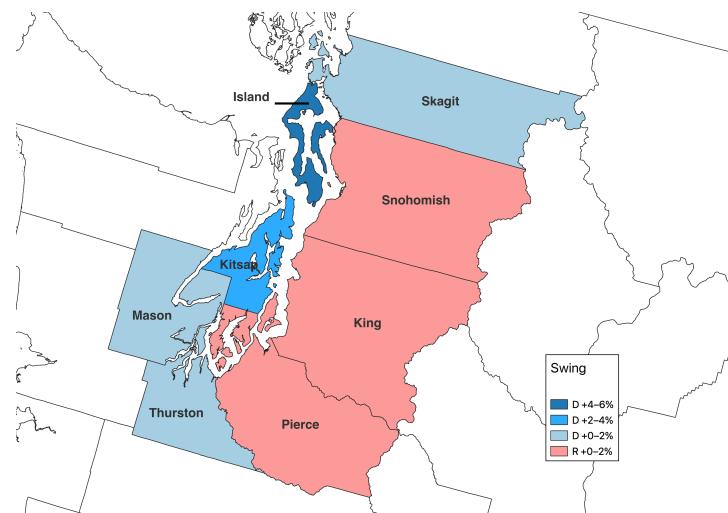


Figure 4: Greater Seattle Area Swing

We see Trump improving on his dreadful margins of defeat in Seattle's core urban counties of King (Seattle), Pierce (Tacoma), and Snohomish (Everett), but performing badly in the outlying regions. It's more informative if we look at the exact vote counts of a couple of these counties.

King County, WA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	269,167 (22.2%)	252,193 (22.3%)	-16,974 (+0.1%)
Democratic	907,310 (74.9%)	832,606 (73.6%)	-74,704 (-1.3%)

Total Swing: R +57,730 (+1.4%)

Kitsap County, WA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	61,563 (38.8%)	59,080 (37.6%)	-2,483 (-1.2%)
Democratic	90,277 (56.9%)	91,731 (58.5%)	+1,454 (+1.6%)

Total Swing: D +3,937 (+2.8%)

King County is the largest county in Washington, home to Seattle. What appears to be a modest gain of 1.4% for Trump is actually a huge 57,730 vote gain. But it's also misleading to call this a "gain", considering that Trump lost 17,000 votes from 2020. It's really a modest loss for Trump which is overshadowed by an enormous loss for Harris, some of which is due to increased support for the Green Party. This trend generalizes to most major cities located in noncompetitive states. It explains why the nationwide trend of decreased turnout from 2024 hurt Harris more than Trump. But this trend of modest losses for Trump and enormous losses for Harris does not carry over to major cities located in competitive states, where turnout was up. Nor did it carry over to the nation's largest megacities (New York, Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay, and the Texas Triangle), nor to post-industrial "Rust Belt" cities that drove Trump's 2016 win. In both of these cases, Trump's vote total increased alongside enormous losses for Harris. We'll look at some of these counties later in this analysis.

What makes the Seattle area unusual is that its outlying counties moved left, even as most suburban, exurban, and satellite counties across the country moved right. This is demonstrated by Kitsap County above, which lies across Puget Sound from Seattle. The Seattle–Bremerton Ferry makes commuting relatively easy, one of the few places in the U.S. where commuting by boat is a feasible option. Lying on a peninsula, the county naturally has a shipbuilding industry that has admittedly seen its better days, but it still persists. Like Washington State as a whole, then, Kitsap County benefits from global trade and wouldn't benefit from Trump's protectionist trade policy.¹⁹ In general, Washington has maintained high wages throughout the Biden Administration and consequently has suffered less from the inflation that's driven many voters to Trump. For these reasons, it follows that Washington had the smallest shift to the right of any state this election. Kitsap County and its neighbors are some of the extremely few counties whose leftward shift is probably not just due to population changes.

We now take a brief interlude to analyze the House of Representatives election in Washington's 3rd Congressional District, based in the southwest corner of the state. It was represented by Republican Jaime Herrera Beutler from 2011 to 2023 before she was eliminated in the 2022 primary by Democrat Marie Gluesenkamp Perez and Republican Joe Kent.²⁰ Kent notably received Trump's endorsement after Herrera Beutler voted to impeach him in 2021. In the most shocking upset of the 2022 election cycle, Gluesenkamp Perez defeated Kent in the general election despite the district having a [Cook PVI](#) of R +5. These two candidates then faced off again in 2024, where Kent was once again favored. Despite Trump himself carrying the district by 3 points, Gluesenkamp Perez defeated Kent by an even greater margin than in 2022.

¹⁹ Melissa Santos, "Washington state had the smallest rightward shift in 2024," Axios, November 26, 2024, <https://wwwaxios.com/local/seattle/2024/11/27/washington-presidential-election-republican-shift>.

²⁰ Washington and California have nonpartisan jungle primaries where the top two vote-getters advance to the general election.

2022 [edit]

2022 United States House of Representatives elections in Washington: 3rd district^[22]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Marie Gluesenkamp Pérez	160,323	50.1
Republican	Joe Kent	157,690	49.3
Write-in		1,760	0.5
Total votes		319,759	100.0
Democratic gain from Republican			

2024 [edit]

2024 United States House of Representatives elections in Washington: 3rd district^[23]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Marie Gluesenkamp Pérez	215,177	51.7
Republican	Joe Kent	199,054	47.9
Write-in		1,673	0.4
Total votes		415,904	100.0
Democratic hold			

This was a key Democratic hold in a year where Democrats nearly managed to seize the House despite massive losses in both the presidency and the Senate. The surprise result is due to candidate quality. As previously discussed, Trump is not popular in Washington. It's one of the few states where he's performed much worse than Mitt Romney did in 2012. In theory, a generic Republican who keeps a distance from Trump while keeping conservative positions like Jaime Herrera Beutler should do well in the Republican-leaning or mixed parts of the state. In fact, Herrera Beutler herself ran for Washington public lands commissioner in 2024. While she didn't win, she outpaced both Kent and Trump in her former district, 57–42, while winning 47% of the vote statewide.

Joe Kent, however, tied himself very closely with Trump and his stolen election claims in his 2022 campaign. To be fair, that was probably necessary to get Trump's endorsement, and he didn't campaign on that in 2024. But he still ran a terrible 2024 campaign. Instead of focusing on the positive elements of his platform like his veteran background and populist economic agenda,²¹ his TV ads painted Perez as a far-left Democrat out-of-touch with voters on

²¹ Jerry Cornfield, "Joe Kent is campaigning differently. Will it make a difference?" *Washington State Stan-*

the border and transgender people in women’s sports.²² These attacks were simply inaccurate, as Marie Gluesenkamp Perez is a Blue Dog Democrat, one of the most conservative Democrats in the House who opposes the Biden–Harris Administration’s border policies as too soft. And while transgender issues played a prominent role throughout this campaign, it is not such a salient topic on its own to make much of a difference in a swing district like WA-3 (I will discuss Trump’s famous “Kamala is for they/them” ad in Part III). Therefore centrist voters in WA-3, even some ultimately voting for Trump, would be comfortable voting for a Blue Dog Democrat like Perez who’s shown herself willing to oppose Biden’s policies.

Kent’s defeat in WA-3 should be contrasted with Dan Newhouse’s victory in the neighboring 4th Congressional District. Like Herrera Beutler, Newhouse was one of the ten Republican Representatives who voted to impeach Trump. He’s now one of only two of those Republicans still in the House, and the only one who defeated a Trump-endorsed challenger. Newhouse is a generic Republican who has done little else in his five terms in Congress to raise eyebrows. On the contrary, his Trump-endorsed opponent the past two elections, Jerrod Sessler, focused his campaigns on the stolen election of 2020 and has been involved with numerous shenanigans.²³ It’s pretty clear which candidate Washington voters would prefer. Even as we’re in a highly polarized climate where most elections are noncompetitive, candidate selection is not totally trivial.

2024 Washington's 4th congressional district election^[21]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Republican	Dan Newhouse (incumbent)	153,477	52.0
Republican	Jerrod Sessler	136,175	46.2
Write-in		5,400	1.8
Total votes		295,052	100.0
Republican hold			

dard, June 6, 2024, <https://washingtonstatestandard.com/2024/06/06/joe-kent-is-campaigning-differently-will-it-make-a-difference/>.

²² Kent’s ads

²³ Such as threatening to shoot a peace officer and announcing debates without his opponent’s knowledge

Chapter 5: Republican Control of the South

We saw with King County the usual trend for major cities: modest Trump losses overshadowed by massive Harris losses, resulting in a net large gain for Trump. But this trend does not hold for major cities in the swing states, where turnout was up from 2020. The Atlanta area shows us what happened in a swing state major city. While the map still uses shift by percentage, in the following table, we use total votes instead of percentages because they better express how much impact each county had on the state's overall results. The table is also truncated to only include the core urban, suburban, and exurban counties of Atlanta. Atlanta is probably the worst case of urban sprawl in the country, and the outlying counties of the Atlanta area aren't yet sufficiently developed to merit their inclusion.

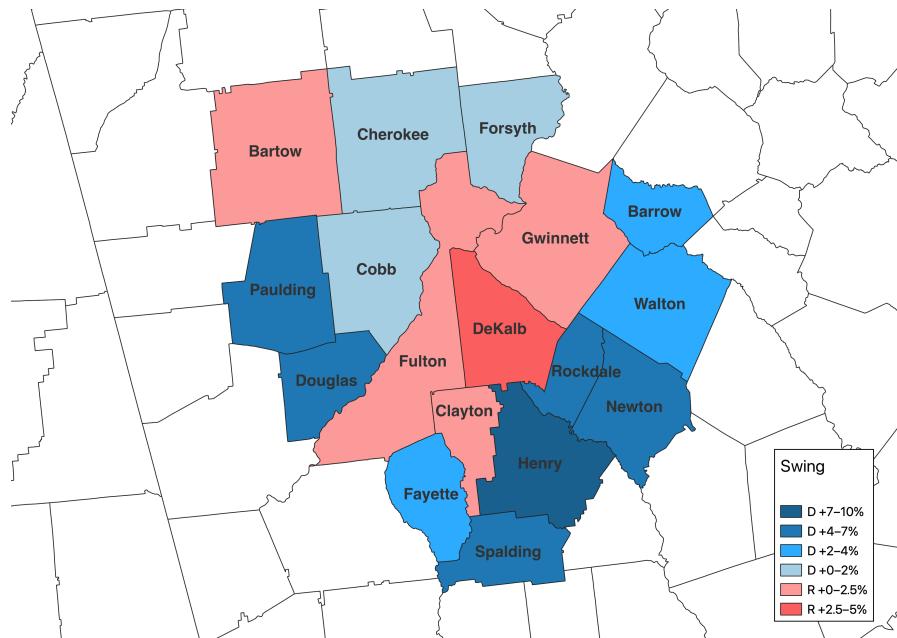


Figure 5: Atlanta Area Swing

Atlanta Area

County	Type	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Change
Fulton, GA	Urban	D +242,965	D +240,097	R +2,868
DeKalb, GA	Suburban	D +249,785	D +237,008	R +12,777
Clayton, GA	Suburban	D +79,655	D +77,326	R +2,329
Gwinnett, GA	Suburban	D +75,594	D +69,466	R +6,128
Cobb, GA	Suburban/Exurban	D +56,411	D +59,725	D +3,314
Douglas, GA	Exurban	D +17,360	D +22,244	D +4,884
Henry, GA	Exurban	D +25,184	D +38,271	D +13,087
Rockdale, GA	Exurban	D +18,223	D +21,454	D +3,231
Newton, GA	Exurban	D +5,920	D +8,946	D +3,026
Spalding, GA	Exurban	R +6,276	R +5,505	D +771
Fayette, GA	Exurban	R +4,894	R +2,355	D +2,539
Paulding, GA	Exurban	R +24,822	R +22,967	D +1,855
Bartow, GA	Exurban	R +25,581	R +29,329	R +3,748
Cherokee, GA	Exurban	R +56,806	R +63,304	R +6,498
Forsyth, GA	Exurban	R +42,915	R +45,772	R +2,857
Barrow, GA	Exurban	R +16,351	R +17,781	R +1,430
Walton, GA	Exurban	R +25,156	R +26,802	R +1,646

Total Swing: R +7,574

In general, the counties in the table are ordered by distance from the center of Atlanta. We can see that all net gains are relatively modest. The suburban counties closest to Atlanta all shifted right, while the exurban counties further out shifted left. The rightward shift of the last six counties, all exurban counties to Atlanta's north and east, is highly misleading due to their major population growth. As a percentage of total votes cast, those counties mostly shifted left, as the map shows; it's just that a massive increase in the number of votes cast

means that Trump still increased his margin of victory in terms of total votes.²⁴ It helps us to examine exact vote totals from a couple counties.

DeKalb County, GA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	58,377 (15.7%)	62,622 (17.1%)	+4,245 (+1.4%)
Democratic	308,162 (83.1%)	299,630 (81.8%)	-8,532 (-1.3%)

Total Swing: R +12,777 (+2.7%)

Henry County, GA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	48,259 (39.2%)	44,982 (34.9%)	-3,277 (-4.3%)
Democratic	73,443 (59.7%)	83,253 (64.5%)	+9,810 (+4.8%)

Total Swing: D +13,087 (+9.1%)

You may look at Trump's 17.1% in DeKalb County and think, "That's horrendous, how can that possibly be good for him?" It's not the absolute percentage that matters here; it's the change from 2020 to 2024. Trump only needed to flip 11,779 votes from 2020 to win Georgia, and it doesn't matter where in Georgia it comes from. It happens that DeKalb County covered that entire margin on its own, even though Trump's vote share there only increased from 16% to 17%. It was by far Trump's largest swing in any single county. Fewer votes were cast in 2024 than 2020, but DeKalb County's population fell in the intervening 4

²⁴ If this seems unintuitive, let's say Trump receives 80% of the vote with 10 votes cast in 2020, then 51% of the vote with 1,000 votes cast in 2024. His margin of victory in terms of percentage obviously shrinks, but his margin of victory in terms of total votes increases drastically.

years, so turnout was essentially the same. There is certainly no massive turnout drop-off as we saw in noncompetitive Seattle.

Henry County, on the other hand, gave a large swing to Kamala Harris. Its +13,087 vote swing left is the largest of any county in any state this election, as is its 9.1% swing by percentage. Incidentally, Henry County also gave Biden his largest swing left by percentage in 2020. Remember that it's a "reverse pivot county", one that voted for McCain and Romney before voting against Trump all three times.

What's happening here? Why is Trump gaining in Atlanta and its close suburbs, but falling in its exurbs? A large reason is population movement. While Atlanta itself has long been blue, its suburbs were red until the mid-2010s, when a massive population increase turned Gwinnett and Cobb Counties blue. Those counties are now growing less quickly (or even, in the case of DeKalb, shrinking), with the latest wave of migrants moving to exurban counties like Henry and Newton. Black voters in particular have fueled Henry County's rapid swing to the left, as the black population increased from 14.7% in 2000 to 48.4% in 2020.

Since Henry County's population is growing, that doesn't explain Trump's loss of 3,277 votes from 2020 to 2024. It suggests that there are a noticeable number of Trump 2020–Harris 2024 voters. It could be due to voters with college degrees, who tend to be less concerned about inflation and the economy, shifting to Harris. This was one of the only demographics measured in exit polls where Harris improved upon Biden's margins.²⁵

In fact, the trend of Harris performing better than Biden in fast-growing exurban counties carries over throughout the South, such as Cabarrus County, North Carolina, outside Charlotte; Johnston County, North Carolina, outside Raleigh; and Chesterfield County, Virginia, outside Richmond. This reflects both population growth in the South as well as the Democratic Party's increasing dominance among the highly educated. This is the one group that's always despised Trump the most, at least the most vocally through the media. Some would frame it as Democrats being the party of only the coastal liberal elites.²⁶ The 2024 election results

²⁵ Andrew Stanton, "Atlanta Suburbs Defy a National Trend Right, Shifting Left," *Newsweek*, November 12, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/atlanta-suburbs-georgia-shift-left-democrats-1984641>.

²⁶ In the words of [Bernie Sanders](#) and [Sean Hannity](#) alike

lend support to that narrative.

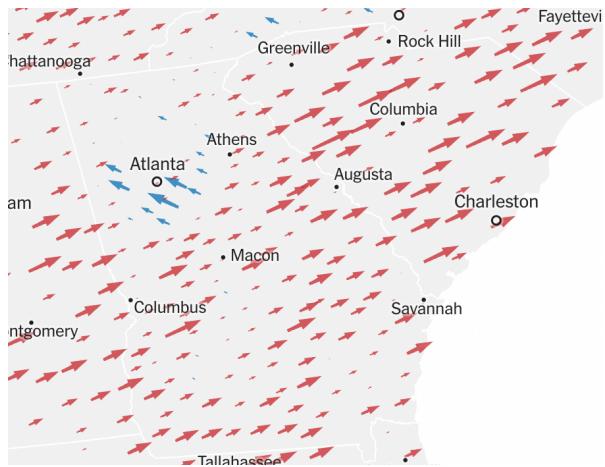
Trump needed to flip 11,779 votes in order to win Georgia, but he only flipped 7,574 votes from the core Atlanta area counties listed in the table above. While the shift in DeKalb County alone would have brought him over the top, Harris made enough gains in the exurbs to offset that. Ultimately, it was not the Atlanta area that gave him the win in Georgia. It was everywhere else.

Georgia Presidential Election, Broken by Atlanta Area vs. Non-Atlanta Area

Stat	Votes
Trump's 2020 Margin of Defeat	-11,779
Trump's 2024 Swing in the Atlanta Area	+7,574
Trump's 2024 Swing Everywhere Else	+119,305
Trump's 2024 Margin of Victory	+115,100

Outside of the Atlanta area, Georgia is largely a rural state like the rest of the South. I'd go so far as saying it's not too dissimilar from neighboring South Carolina, a state that saw one of the larger swings to the right. Here's the *New York Times* vector field showing each county's swing by percentage:²⁷

²⁷ The vector field can be found [here](#).



The shifts in Georgia are a bit smaller than those in South Carolina, probably because of increased Democratic turnout in Georgia due to it being a competitive state. But the movement in South Carolina is largely the same as the movement in Georgia outside of the Atlanta area, especially in East and South Central Georgia. This is useful, since it enables us to leverage data from South Carolina to help explain the shifts in Georgia.

South Carolina, as well as the South more generally, has been favorable to Trump in comparison to other Republicans. He nearly swept the South in the 2016 Republican primaries, even as he was losing to Ted Cruz in the Plains. Even more notably, he trounced Nikki Haley in her home state of South Carolina in the 2024 primaries, largely off the strength of white, non-college educated voters who identified with his America First ideology.²⁸ Population growth also plays a large role. Whereas migration to Southern suburbs and exurbs has largely favored Democrats, migration to Southern medium and small cities has favored Republicans. This is illustrated by Horry County, home to Myrtle Beach.

²⁸ Josh Boak and Linley Sanders, “Here’s how Trump won in South Carolina — and what it could mean for his chances in November,” Associated Press, February 26, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/who-voted-how-south-carolina-primary-trump-haley-86a0c7960e5c3c7f88ec1c9a330be53e>.

Horry County, SC

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	118,821 (66.1%)	141,719 (68.8%)	+22,898 (+2.7%)
Democratic	59,180 (32.9%)	62,325 (30.3%)	+3,145 (-2.6%)

Total Swing: R +19,753 (+5.3%)

Horry County was home to the Trump campaign's most productive call center in 2016. Trump is popular there and throughout the South because of his apparent authenticity as a non-politician outsider.²⁹ Voters there agree that the Democratic Party is increasingly becoming the party of urban, well-educated elites that don't speak to them. But remember, it was less than 30 years ago when a Southern Democrat won the presidency while carrying half the South. As much as the South may have abandoned the Democratic Party due to its embrace of civil rights in the 1960s, even more so has the Democratic Party abandoned the South. It's not racism that drives opposition to immigration. It's the perception, whether real or mistaken, that immigrants are taking Americans' jobs and lowering their wages, at the behest of the large corporations that back not just the Democratic Party, but also establishment Republicans like Nikki Haley. This is why Trump always performs so well in South Carolina and why he flipped Georgia.

In the 142 Georgia counties outside of the Atlanta area counties listed in the table, Trump gained a net of 119,305 votes from 2020, making for an average swing of 840 votes per county. All these county swings are minuscule on the individual level, but they add up to create a solid Trump victory. Of course, there's some variation among these 142 counties, with some even shifting toward Harris. Here are the extremes in both directions:

²⁹ Meredith Helline, "Horry County played vital role in Trump victory," WMBF, November 10, 2016, <https://www.wmbfnews.com/story/33676105/horry-county-played-vital-role-in-trump-victory/>.

Houston County, GA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	41,540 (55.5%)	45,090 (55.3%)	+3,550 (-0.2%)
Democratic	32,239 (43.1%)	35,907 (44.1%)	+3,668 (+1%)

Total Swing: D +118 (+1.2%)

Lowndes County, GA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	25,692 (55.4%)	28,081 (58.7%)	+2,389 (+3.3%)
Democratic	20,116 (43.4%)	19,487 (40.8%)	-629 (-2.6%)

Total Swing: R +3,018 (+5.9%)

Houston County, home to Warner Robins, is growing rapidly. It seems to have bucked the trend of migrants to Southern small cities leaning Republican. Lowndes County, home to Valdosta, is on the Florida border and not growing as rapidly. It's representative of the smaller counties surrounding it, which all have similar swings to the right by percentage.

We continue our tour of the South in North Carolina, a state pundits foolishly picked to turn blue in both 2016 and 2020, and that was labeled by the media as a "swing state" in 2024. Despite electing Democratic governors in 2016, 2020, and 2024, North Carolina is no swing state on the presidential level. It's a consistently red state that Obama managed to win once in a shocking upset, and which has only been getting increasingly red during the Trump era.

That's not to say there weren't any bright spots for Harris in North Carolina. After Hurricane Helene ravaged through Western North Carolina in late September, Democrats hoped the federal response to Helene would boost Harris, while Republicans portrayed the

response as chaotic and lacking. The reality is that Harris did, in fact, visit North Carolina in the aftermath of the hurricane, and impacted residents generally favored Harris's narrative over Trump's.³⁰ Thanks to excellent recovery efforts, nearly all polling places were open in Western North Carolina, dispelling any fears of storm-induced turnout decline. Returns were favorable to Harris, making it yet another one of the few regions where she improved over Biden.

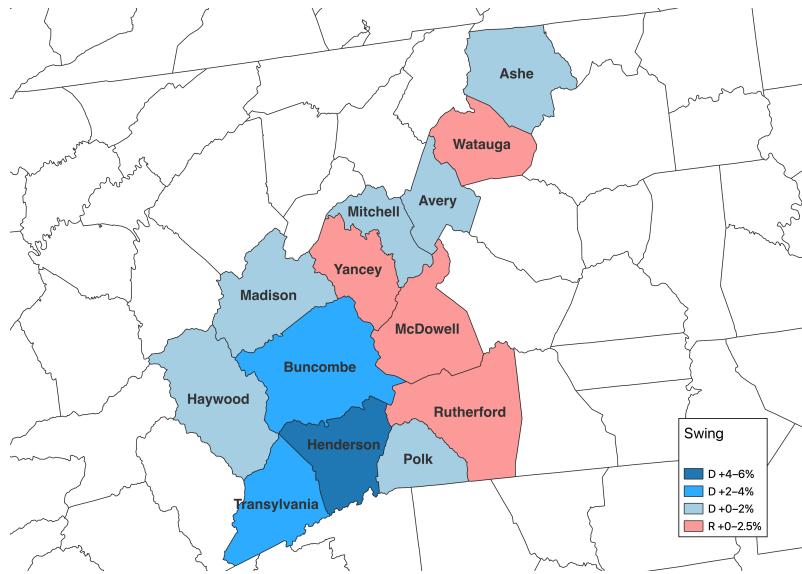


Figure 6: Western North Carolina Swing

This doesn't necessarily mean that Hurricane Helene caused Harris's relative success here. It's likely that she would have done well anyway because of, you guessed it, population movement. Outside of college-educated voters (and demographics confounded by college-educated voters), pretty much the only demographic in which Harris performed better than Biden is Boomers. Western North Carolina, Asheville in particular, in the Blue Ridge Mountains is one of the most appealing places to retire in the country. Asheville has also been a top destination for remote workers, who lean Democratic. Buncombe County saw the third-largest swing of

³⁰ Colleen Long and Ayanna Alexander, "Harris pledges ongoing federal support as she visits North Carolina to survey Helene's aftermath," Associated Press, October 5, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/kamala-harris-democrats-hurricane-helene-13475a09f3fed719a1b451105ab15ccf>.

any county toward Harris by total votes this election.

Buncombe County, NC

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	62,412 (38.6%)	59,016 (36.8%)	-3,396 (-1.8%)
Democratic	96,515 (59.7%)	98,662 (61.5%)	+2,147 (+1.8%)

Total Swing: D +5,543 (+3.6%)

As with Henry County, GA, there's definitely some non-insignificant number of Trump 2020–Harris 2024 voters. Democratic consultant Morgan Jackson speculates that some long-time Republicans in this area voted for Harris, especially as statewide Republicans nominate increasingly unhinged candidates like Mark Robinson for governor.³¹

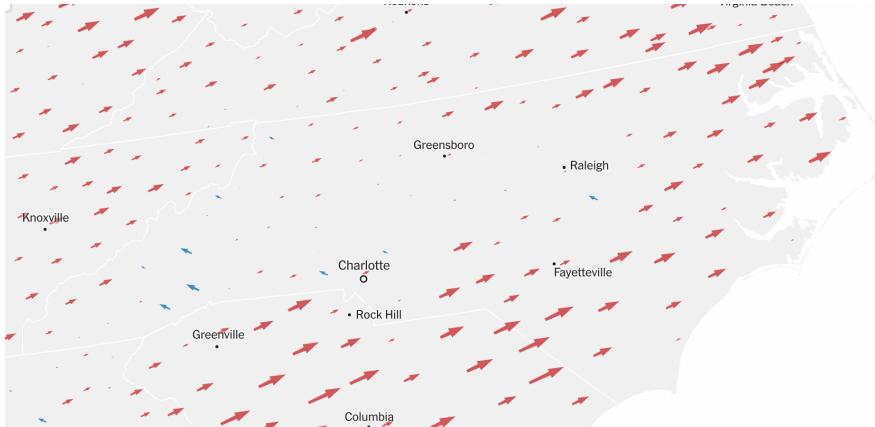
Of course, the problem with regional trends due to population movement is that a vote gained in one region is a vote lost in another. Many of the Western North Carolina transplants have moved there from elsewhere in North Carolina, meaning there's no net benefit for Democrats.

North Carolina

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	2,758,775 (49.9%)	2,898,423 (50.9%)	+139,648 (+1%)
Democratic	2,648,292 (48.6%)	2,715,375 (47.6%)	+31,083 (-1%)

Total Swing: R +108,565 (+2%)

³¹ Brandon Kingdollar, “While the U.S. veered right, western NC moved left. Here’s what experts say caused it.” *NC Newsline*, December 4, 2024, <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/12/04/western-nc-moved-left-political-experts-explainer/>.



The *New York Times* vector field shows where Trump's gains in North Carolina came from. As we previously showed, Western North Carolina saw gains for Harris. The major metropolitan areas of the Piedmont generally saw little change in either direction. The urban cores of Charlotte, Greensboro–Winston-Salem, and Raleigh saw slight movement toward Trump, while their exurbs like Cabarrus and Johnston Counties saw slight movement toward Harris. But it's clear that the real reason why Trump expanded his margin of victory by 100,000 votes and 2% is Eastern North Carolina, a rural region similar to South Carolina and East Georgia.

We finish our tour of the South with Florida. A bellwether state with a perfect presidential voting record from 1996 to 2016, Florida became a red state during the Trump era. It goes back as far as 2016, where Trump's win was fueled by gains along the Gulf Coast. Even as the rest of the country shifted left in 2020, Trump carried Florida by a larger margin while continuing to run up the margins along the Gulf Coast (there's an even greater reason for his victory that'll be the subject of the next chapter). Then, of course, came Ron DeSantis's landslide 20-point victory in his 2022 reelection bid. Much has been made of Florida's rapid transition to a solid red state, such as [this Vox video](#) that has received over 2 million views as of writing.

The Gulf Coast's massive population growth has certainly benefited Republicans. The state actively courted transplants who opposed lockdowns and other restrictive measures in

blue states during the COVID-19 pandemic. New Republican voter registrations doubled new Democratic registrations among those who moved to Florida in that time. What bodes well for Republicans is that it's not just old retirees moving there. It's also families that struggled with balancing work and remote learning due to school closures. Other reasons people are moving to Florida include its lack of income tax and low corporate taxes, making it a business-friendly environment.³²

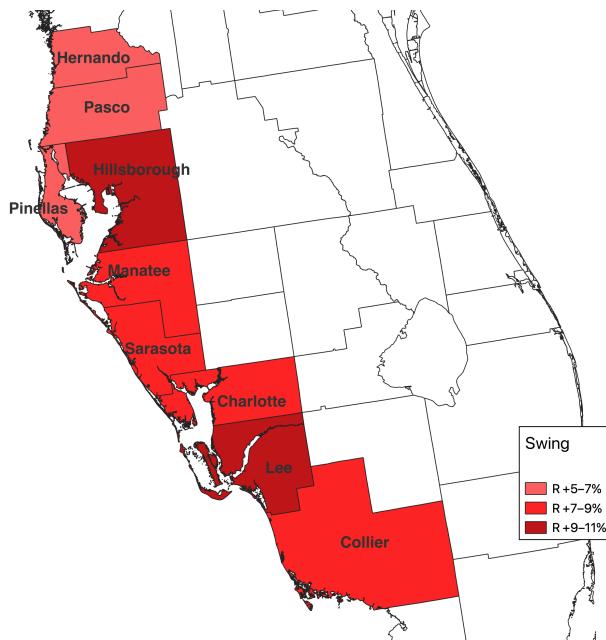


Figure 7: Florida Gulf Coast Swing

The displayed counties encompass the Tampa Bay area in the north (stretching from Spring Hill in Hernando County to Sarasota in Sarasota County) and Southwest Florida in the south. Tampa Bay is one of the largest and most historically prominent regions in the entire South. But it's not the historic major cities of Tampa (in Hillsborough County) and St. Petersburg (in Pinellas County) that are driving the area's rapid growth. Their populations have actually remained fairly stagnant over the past few years. It's the outlying areas (exurbs,

³² Logan Padgett, "Why Are People Moving to Florida?" James Madison Institute, 2022, <https://jamesmadison.org/why-are-people-moving-to-florida/>.

satellite cities, whatever you want to call them), home to cheaper land waiting for development, that are growing. Furthermore, the entirety of Southwest Florida is like that. Fort Myers (in Lee County) was the largest city on this stretch of the Gulf Coast, between Tampa Bay and Miami, until the 1980s, when it was rapidly eclipsed by its “suburb” Cape Coral. Now Cape Coral is a booming city of 225,000, more than twice as large as Fort Myers (the difference was greater in 2010, but Fort Myers finally started growing again in the 2010s). Effectively, Southwest Florida is now a sprawling collection of suburbs without a central city. It’s the quintessential example of the “Sun Belt”, the rapidly growing, warm climate parts of the South and Southwest made livable thanks to the advent of air conditioning.

These growth patterns are illustrated by the differing results in the traditionally suburban Pinellas County and the more outlying Lee County.

Pinellas County, FL

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	276,209 (49.3%)	269,472 (52.1%)	-6,737 (+2.8%)
Democratic	277,450 (49.6%)	242,452 (46.9%)	-34,998 (-2.7%)

Total Swing: R +28,621 (+5.5%)

Lee County, FL

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	233,247 (59.2%)	250,661 (63.9%)	+17,414 (+4.7%)
Democratic	157,695 (40%)	139,240 (35.5%)	-18,455 (-4.5%)

Total Swing: R +35,869 (+9.2%)

Having voted for the winner in every presidential election since 2000, Pinellas County is now the bellwether county with the third longest such streak. It continued that streak rather

dubiously in 2024, thanks to a massive decrease in turnout that saw both candidates fall from their 2020 vote totals, with Harris suffering much more as is typical in non-competitive states. The caveat is that unlike the rest of Florida, Pinellas County is not growing; its population of just under 1 million hasn't changed since the 2020 Census according to Census Bureau estimates.

Lee County, on the other hand, is growing very quickly, having grown from 765,000 to 835,000 between 2020 and 2023. But the trend we see is equal Republican gains and Democratic losses in the county, despite a large population increase (of course, it's only new people of voting age that matter; population growth due to the birth rate is irrelevant). We can assume that new voters lean Republican and that Democratic turnout was depressed as it was in most places, but it still leads me to believe that a large number of Biden voters in 2020 voted for Trump. The statewide data make this a mathematical certainty.

Florida

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	5,668,731 (51.2%)	6,110,125 (56.1%)	+441,394 (+4.9%)
Democratic	5,297,045 (47.9%)	4,683,038 (43%)	-614,007 (-4.9%)

Total Swing: R +1,055,041 (+9.8%)

Republicans moving to Florida can only explain so much of Florida's rightward march. The state is growing quickly, but not to a gain of 441,394 new Republican voters, and Democrats almost certainly aren't fleeing Florida in even more drastic numbers. Former Democratic voters must be voting Republican, both for DeSantis in 2022 and for Trump in 2024. A great amount, if not most, of this change is due to Florida's Latino population, as I'll address in the next chapter. But the trend of collapsing Democratic support exists everywhere in Florida, even where the Latino population is low.

An underappreciated reason for Republicans' newfound dominance in Florida is that the Democratic Party abandoned it, not just in the sense that it doesn't speak to the issues Floridians care about, but that the Democratic Party has failed to provide institutional and financial support to its candidates. This has been part of a long-lasting Democratic Party policy not to fund state parties in every state, but to focus resources on individual "swing races". As DeSantis was seen as undefeatable in his 2022 reelection bid, the Party made no effort to contest the state.³³ Their candidate was the former Republican, twice-failed Senate candidate, and already once-failed governor candidate Charlie Crist. Were Crist's credentials as a former Republican governor of the state (2007–2011) supposed to signal some latent popularity? How much less in resources, then, did Democrats put into mobilizing turnout in 2024 after DeSantis's absolute landslide victory. If Washington State is a textbook example of Republican Party incompetence in nominating strong candidates and running good campaigns, then Florida is the textbook example of Democratic incompetence.

³³ Alexandra Martinez, "Grassroots organizers in Florida say the Democratic Party has 'given up' on the state," Prism Reports, November 22, 2022, <https://prismreports.org/2022/11/22/democratic-party-given-up-florida/>.

Chapter 6: Latinos Vote Trump

In an election otherwise devoid of much coalitional realignment, the 2020 election saw Trump make massive inroads with Latino voters in South Florida and South Texas. Not only did this trend continue in 2024, but it also accelerated to sweep up Latino voters across the entire country. If the Edison exit poll³⁴ is to be believed, Harris held onto Latinos with 51% of the vote, but this is way down from 65% in 2020³⁵ and in 2016.³⁶ Above all other factors, this is the single trend most responsible for Florida's rightward lurch in 2022 and 2024. Miami-Dade County, 69% Hispanic as of the 2020 Census, saw a 205,116-vote swing in favor of Trump in 2020. Trump followed that up in 2024 with an even-larger 210,266-vote swing.

Miami-Dade County, FL

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	532,833 (46.1%)	605,590 (55.4%)	+72,757 (+9.3%)
Democratic	617,864 (53.4%)	480,355 (43.9%)	-137,509 (-9.5%)

Total Swing: R +210,266 (+18.8%)

First, observe the low turnout in 2024. Miami-Dade County's population has shrunk since 2020, but not by 65,000. This suggests a very large number of former Democratic voters broke for Trump this election. Democrats have attempted to paint Trump as a xenophobic racist because of his flamboyant rhetoric and his tough border policies. Ultimately, this messaging catered well to wealthy, urban liberals of all races, but most Latino voters are not part of this demographic. Instead, they identified with Trump's opposition to illegal immigration, seeing as many of them were legal immigrants who went through the proper process of immigration and naturalization. Coupled with the fact that working-class voters of all races, Latinos representing a much larger share of this population than of the coastal elite population, have been

³⁴ [2024 Exit Poll](#)

³⁵ [2020 Exit Poll](#)

³⁶ [2016 Exit Poll](#)

hurt by inflation and have fond memories of the economy during Trump's first administration, this meant Trump's message was more appealing than Democrats' message. Despite what I titled this chapter, I don't think the real takeaway here is "Latinos vote Trump". It's that working-class voters of all races voted for Trump. There appears to be a seismic pro-Trump shift among Latinos simply because he started out from such a low position.

Republicans, recognizing that coalitions are the key to winning elections, are working to reorient themselves as a multicultural, multiracial, working-class party. Young Republicans like JD Vance are leading this push as we see a battle for the soul of the Republican Party.³⁷ The proscription of traditional Republicans like Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley, who embody the traditional Washington consensus that dominated his first administration, from Trump's Cabinet suggests that Trump sides with his newly built coalition. Whether Trump governs that way will likely determine whether the new Republican coalition can last.

Just as I don't think the reason for Latinos' turn to the Republicans is due to Latino-oriented messaging (I don't believe Republican red-baiting, i.e. portraying their Democratic opponents as socialists, was ever an effective strategy; more on red-baiting later in this chapter), I don't think Democrats' pathway back will come from Latino-oriented messaging. The continuing use of the slur "Latinx" seems like a gift to Republicans,³⁸ although I personally remain doubtful of its significance. Portraying Republicans as racists has also proven time and again to be ineffective, so it was ludicrous to believe that some comedian's joke about Puerto Rico was going to meaningfully impact the election. I discuss Democrats' messaging on race in more detail in Chapter 14.

³⁷ Darvio Morrow, "Ep. 261 - Outlaws Xtra: Senate candidate JD Vance talks about his plans, uniting black and white working class voters and more," *The Outlaws Radio Show*, podcast audio, November 24, 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-261-outlaws-xtra-senate-candidate-jd-vance-talks/id1006983449?i=1000542980987>.

³⁸ Amanda Sahar d'Urso and Marcel F. Roman, "The X Factor: How Group Labels Shape Politics," 2024, https://www.marcelroman.com/pdfs/wps/latinx_project.pdf.

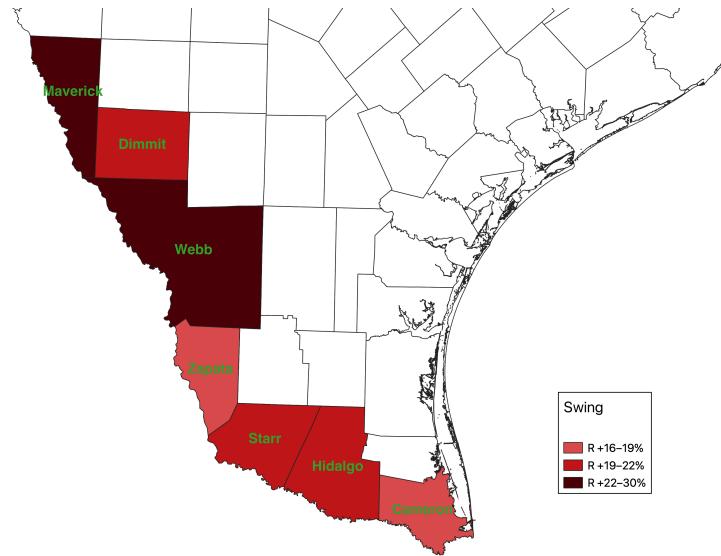


Figure 8: South Texas Swing

Until 2024, South Texas was the historically longest-lasting Democratic region in the country. In 2024, Trump became the first Republican to carry Starr County (Rio Grande City) since Benjamin Harrison in 1892, Webb County (Laredo) since Taft in 1912, and Maverick County (Eagle Pass) since Hoover in 1928. Six of the twelve counties with the largest swings toward Trump in the entire nation are among these displayed counties (all except Zapata). Another two of the top twelve (El Paso and Culberson) are in West Texas, and yet another (Imperial, CA) is on the Mexican border. With a swing of 28%, Maverick County had the largest swing of any county in the country.

Maverick County, TX

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	6,881 (44.8%)	9,285 (59%)	+2,404 (+14.2%)
Democratic	8,332 (54.3%)	6,373 (40.5%)	-1,959 (-13.8%)

Total Swing: R +4,363 (+28%)

Maverick County's population is shrinking, so we know the change is being driven by Biden 2020 voters switching to Trump in 2024. In the grand scheme of things, Texas is so big that these border counties, even with their massive shifts toward Trump, don't contribute much to the outcome of any races. Even the largest border county, El Paso, only saw a shift of 55,000 votes to Trump, whereas the state's largest county overall, Harris, saw a 131,000-vote swing. They're not the reason why Texas won't be going blue in the foreseeable future. The Texas Triangle of Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio will determine the state's political fate, just by its size and its rapid growth. But South Texas is an indicator of problems to come for the Democratic Party, not just in Texas but in demographically similar states like New Mexico and Arizona. When the most historically robust element of the Democratic coalition turns Republican, it's a warning that a lot more may fall soon.

Trump would have won Florida and Texas even without the massive shift in Latino voters, but this might not be true in Arizona. A long-time red state, Biden won Arizona with a razor-thin 10,457-vote margin in 2020, fueled by massive turnout. But this was not to be repeated in 2024, as Arizona was the sole competitive state that saw lower turnout than in 2020. Trump won Arizona with a decisive 5.5% margin, with the key county being Maricopa County per usual.

Arizona

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	1,661,686 (49%)	1,770,242 (52.2%)	+108,556 (+3.2%)
Democratic	1,672,143 (49.4%)	1,582,860 (46.7%)	-89,283 (-2.7%)

Total Swing: R +197,839 (+5.9%)

Maricopa County, AZ

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	995,665 (48.1%)	1,051,531 (51.2%)	+55,866 (+3.1%)
Democratic	1,040,774 (50.3%)	980,016 (47.7%)	-60,758 (-2.6%)

Total Swing: R +116,624 (+5.7%)

If Latinos continue to vote Republican, then I could see Biden's 2020 win in Arizona going down as one of the most shocking one-off upsets in any state in recent history, on the level of Obama winning Indiana in 2008. But none of this is guaranteed. Even as Trump won a commanding victory in Arizona, Kari Lake lost decisively in the Senate election.



Arizona President vs. Senate Comparison

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	1,770,242 (52.2%)	1,595,761 (47.6%)	-174,481 (-4.6%)
Democratic	1,582,860 (46.7%)	1,676,335 (50.1%)	+93,475 (+3.4%)

Total Difference: Gallego +267,956 (+8%)

Kari Lake is known for her election denial and little else (and let's just say what little else she's known for isn't much better than election denial), which is not a recipe for success. It's a negative message that doesn't mobilize voters but alienates them. But Arizona Republicans' Senate woes go beyond Lake. This now marks four consecutive Senate elections won by Democrats, by three different Democrats (Kyrsten Sinema, Mark Kelly, and Ruben Gallego) against three different Republicans (Martha McSally and Blake Masters were the others). The ironic thing is that Masters and especially Lake are ardent Trumpists. Trump himself is famously an extreme election denier like Lake. In Chapter 8, I'll discuss why Trump in 2024 was immunized from the negative impacts of his election denial. But for now, it suffices to say that Arizonans don't want to elect "Trump in heels".

Arizona is also home to a sizable Native American population, albeit one that's not large enough to impact the outcome of most elections. According to the Edison exit poll, Trump won 68% of Native Americans in 2024, which is absurdly high considering Native Americans' historical Democratic tendencies (except in Oklahoma). Even though I'm strongly inclined to disbelieve these numbers, there was indeed a large shift in predominantly Native counties toward Trump this election, just not so much to give him a two-thirds majority. This is demonstrated by Apache County:

Apache County, AZ

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	11,442 (32.5%)	12,795 (40%)	+1,353 (+7.5%)
Democratic	23,293 (66.2%)	18,872 (58.9%)	-4,421 (-7.3%)

Total Swing: R +5,774 (+14.8%)

This 5,000-vote swing isn't nearly large enough to have made any difference to the outcome, and it's mostly driven by population loss. But it does show that like Latinos, Native Americans have been hit particularly hard by inflation and the economic woes of the past 4 years and are turning to Trump as a result.

We end our analysis of the Latino-heavy border states with California. While Maverick County, Texas, saw the largest rightward shift of any county by percentage, the largest rightward shift of any county by total votes occurred in, rather dubiously, Los Angeles County. It's a dubious outcome because Los Angeles County is far and away the largest county in the country, as it also saw the largest shifts by total votes against Trump in 2016 and 2020.³⁹

³⁹ For the same reason, California bears the dubious distinction of having the largest shift of any state toward Trump by total votes.

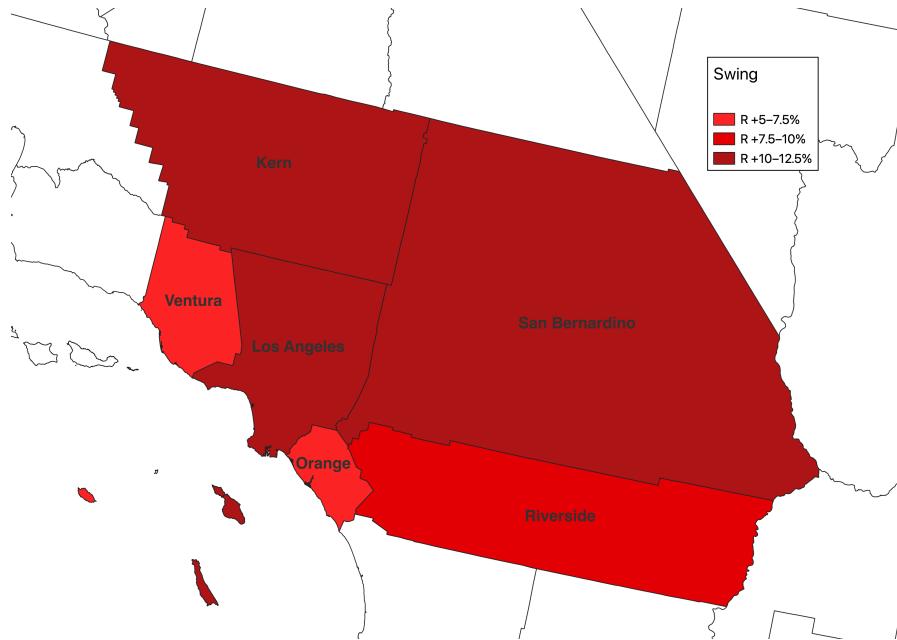


Figure 9: Greater Los Angeles Area Swing

Los Angeles County, CA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	1,145,530 (26.9%)	1,189,862 (31.9%)	+44,332 (+5%)
Democratic	3,028,885 (71%)	2,417,109 (64.8%)	-611,776 (-6.2%)

Total Swing: R +656,108 (+11.2%)

I highlight the Greater Los Angeles area for several reasons. Obviously, it's not because it impacted the outcome of the election. But it reflects the trend seen in megacities across the entire country, especially ones with large Latino populations. While most major urban areas in noncompetitive states, like Seattle, saw modest turnout declines for Trump and massive turnout declines for Harris, the eight largest megacities/megaregions (New York, Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay, and the Texas Triangle) saw Trump make meaningful gains alongside Harris's massive losses. Even as Los Angeles

County is shrinking, having fallen below 10 million people, Trump is still gaining votes, showing that he won over a significant number of Biden 2020 voters.

So the question is why there was enthusiasm for Trump in the megacities but not as much in your run-of-the-mill major city like Seattle or Minneapolis or Columbus. As you may expect, it's the economy. New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and (honorarily) Chicago are the textbook examples of the life of coastal, urban elites. They produce career-climbing politicians, best exemplified this election by California's own Kamala Harris, whom voters are increasingly perceiving as out-of-touch and not representing their real economic struggles. The irony, of course, is that Trump is very much a coastal elite himself whose first-term policies, like major corporate tax cuts, benefited coastal elites more than any other group. But it's messaging that wins elections. Kamala Harris can stand atop her secluded mountain home in Brentwood and dismiss high gas prices as irrelevant, but this does not match the experiences of the worker in South LA who has to deal with inflation and crime. For over a century, since Jacob Riis first documented it in New York,⁴⁰ the dichotomy between the classes is nowhere more evident than in America's megacities. I encourage curious adventurers who live near or travel to Los Angeles County to traverse the entire county east-to-west in a single day, especially at night if you dare. It's a journey of constant transition from wealthy suburb to post-industrial decline to gentrified downtown to homeless tent city to ethnic enclave to billionaires' mountain hideaway to coastal resort. It'll be no surprise that Trump's economic message can be quite appealing in the less well-off parts of the county.

Despite Harris's poor performance in the Los Angeles area relative to Biden, Democratic House candidates, somewhat shockingly, performed better than in 2020. Democrats even managed to flip two seats, CA-27 in Los Angeles County and CA-45 in Orange County.

⁴⁰ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*. (New York: 1890), <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/riis-and-reform.html>.

Mike Garcia's Elections, 2020–2024



Redistricting after the 2020 Census resulted in Mike Garcia's district being renumbered from the 25th to the 27th. Both the old and the new districts are based in the northern exurbs of Los Angeles, especially Santa Clarita and Palmdale. The new district is slightly more Democratic-leaning than the old, as a Republican-leaning area in Simi Valley was replaced with a Democratic-leaning area in Lancaster. You can argue that this amounts to gerrymandering, even though redistricting in California is done by an independent commission. Contrary to the prevailing narrative, there's nothing stopping independent commissions from gerrymandering. One of the top priorities of California's independent redistricting commission is to keep "communities of interest" within the same district, which can have the side-effect of systematically benefiting one party.⁴¹ In my personal opinion, the real problem with gerrymandering in California is not that it benefits the Democratic Party, but that it benefits certain influential incumbents (Kevin McCarthy and Maxine Waters were given suspiciously shaped districts with highly favorable demographics... but I digress).

⁴¹ Sameea Kamal, "California redistricting 101: What you need to know," *CalMatters*, November 4, 2021, <https://calmatters.org/politics/2021/11/california-redistricting-what-you-need-to-know/>. You can pass off "packing" as keeping together a community of interest, or "cracking" by selectively choosing one community of interest to keep together and breaking up a neighboring community.

In both the old and the new districts, in every election since 2020, Republican Mike Garcia has been predicted to lose. But he won each time until losing in 2024, which comes as a shock given Democrats' relatively poor performance in Los Angeles County. This was a key Democratic pick-up in allowing Democrats nationwide to come close to retaking the House. I think the explanation is candidate quality. Biden won this district in 2020 even as Garcia won the House seat, showing that Trump is not as popular compared to a generic Republican. This makes sense since the district is exurban. Garcia was initially popular as a veteran and former employee in the aerospace industry, which has a significant presence in the district. But as a Congressman, he aligned himself closely with Trump and took a hard-line position against abortion, which doesn't sit as well in the district. His Democratic opponent, George Whitesides, also has aerospace ties, being the former CEO of Virgin Galactic, a major employer of district residents. Thus a candidate in-touch with the district defeated an incumbent who had grown out-of-touch, showing that candidate quality still matters in purple districts.

Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than neighboring Orange County, one of the most diverse counties in the nation. Once a Republican bastion, voting for every Republican presidential nominee from 1940 to 2012, it has since voted against Trump all three times. It's a "reverse pivot county" like Henry County, GA, giving it the dubious record of being wrong in four of the last five elections. Even as Trump made major gains throughout the Los Angeles area, they were more modest in Orange County.

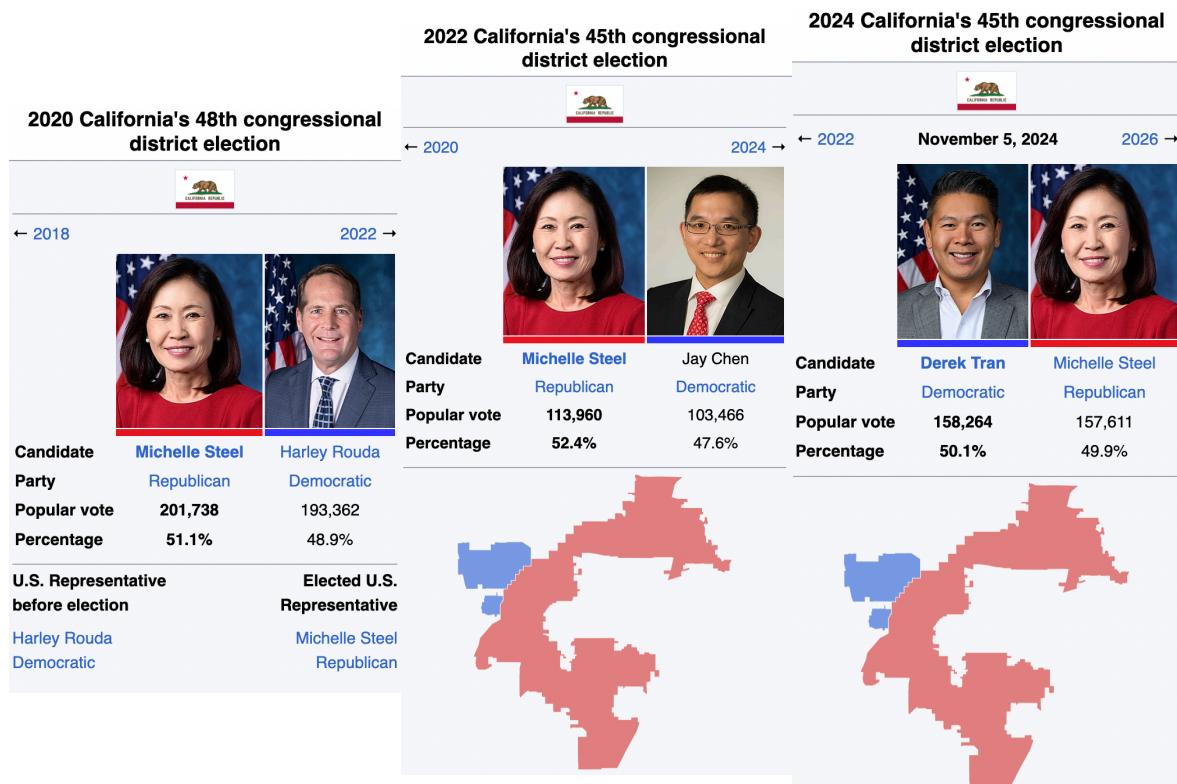
Orange County, CA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	676,498 (44.4%)	654,815 (47.1%)	-21,683 (+2.7%)
Democratic	814,009 (53.5%)	691,731 (49.7%)	-122,278 (-3.8%)

Total Swing: R +100,595 (+6.5%)

It appears that Trump has a huge 100,000-vote gain, but it's actually a loss for both candidates. You can see that support for third-party candidates was higher than in 2020, with Jill Stein and Robert Kennedy Jr. each receiving 16,000 votes and 1.2% of the vote. Being a suburban county with a lower proportion of Latino voters as the other Los Angeles area counties, it makes sense that Trump's not as appealing here; he never has been. But what's even less intuitive is that Republican House candidates underperformed in 2024 compared to 2020 and 2022. In my personal opinion, the single most shocking outcome in a House race this entire cycle was Democratic challenger Derek Tran defeating two-term Republican incumbent Michelle Steel in the 45th Congressional District. The district is as purple as Orange County, being one-third Asian with Vietnamese-Americans being the largest ethnic group, one that has historically leaned Republican. Unlike Garcia, Steel is not a diehard Trumpist.

Michelle Steel's Elections, 2020–2024



Part of me simply wants to write off Steel’s defeat to redistricting, with her 2022 victory just being due to low turnout in a midterm election. When Steel defeated incumbent Harley Rouda in 2020, the district was considerably more Republican, being mostly limited to Orange County’s conservative coastal cities like Huntington Beach and Newport Beach. The new district, however, was redrawn to remove those coastal Republican strongholds, and in their place a solidly Democratic chunk of Los Angeles County was added. You can see that Steel actually won the Orange County portion of the district (comprising 88% of all voters), but her defeat in the Los Angeles County portion led her to lose by a razor-thin 653-vote margin. This is a case where I believe Republicans have a credible argument to blame gerrymandering. The independent redistricting commission justified the new district’s boundaries as keeping together Orange County’s Vietnamese-American community, which until now has always been broken among multiple districts. But that could very well mask the cracking of other communities that were previously held together in one district. Even more so than its already odd crescent shape, the inclusion of the Los Angeles County portion is incredibly dubious given that a priority of the redistricting commission is to avoid having districts cross county lines. I have a broader discussion of gerrymandering’s impacts on 2024 House elections in the next chapter.

The non-gerrymandering explanation of Derek Tran’s upset victory in this district is that he ran a better campaign. In particular, Steel attempted the redbaiting strategy of portraying Tran as a communist sympathizer, in spite of Tran’s descent from the South Vietnamese “boat people”. The strategy backfired spectacularly, as Tran leveraged his Vietnamese heritage to connect with voters. Tran himself rejects labeling this as “identity politics”, and there is an important distinction.⁴² Identity politics says to vote for a candidate just because of their ethnic or gender identity, whereas what Tran did was use shared experiences with his voters to refute Steel’s attacks. Voters did not vote for Tran just because he’s Vietnamese. He won by showing himself to be a better representative for his Vietnamese-American constituency, even those that voted for Trump.

⁴² Melanie Mason, “This Vietnamese American Candidate Just Blew Up the Democratic Campaign Playbook,” *Politico*, December 9, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/12/09/how-derek-tran-flipped-a-gop-district-00192996>.

Chapter 7: Gerrymandering's Impact on the 2024 House Elections

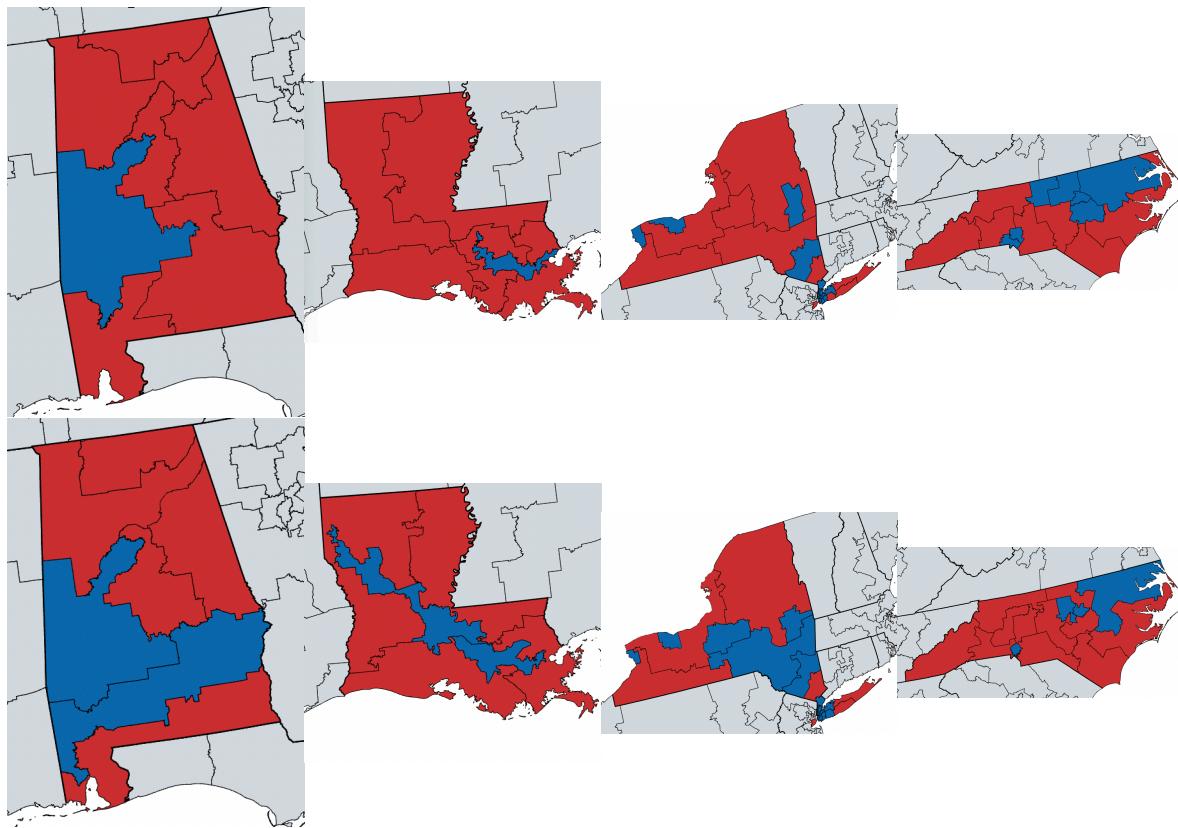
I already discussed gerrymandering in California, namely how the presence of an independent commission does not preclude it from happening. In states with independent commissions, gerrymandering generally doesn't exist to benefit one political party over another, but to protect influential incumbents like Maxine Waters and the now-disgraced Kevin McCarthy by giving them demographically favorable constituencies. But I do believe that changes to Michelle Steel's Congressional district qualify as gerrymandering that, whether intentionally or not, benefited the Democratic Party.

Pundits and researchers have mixed views of gerrymandering's impact on the overall House makeup. Most claim that Republicans benefit somewhat, while a significant minority claims both parties do it enough to cancel out. I don't claim to answer that question now. It's invalid to sum up the total popular votes of each party and compute expected House seats from that, because not all races are contested by a candidate from each party. It's just as invalid to use popular votes from other elections as a proxy, since they ignore variation in candidate quality.

What *can* be easily analyzed, however, is the impact of gerrymandering on states that changed their Congressional district maps between the 2022 and 2024 elections. Of the five states that changed their maps between the two elections, four of them saw net changes in favor of one party.⁴³ Alabama and Louisiana were ordered by courts to redraw their maps in order to remove racial gerrymandering. On the other hand, New York and North Carolina were given the chance to redraw their maps without limitation, allowing those states to introduce gerrymandering where it previously didn't exist.

⁴³ Georgia was the one that didn't. Its map changed from a heavily Republican gerrymander to another heavily Republican gerrymander.

Congressional Districts before and after Redistricting



Ultimately, Democrats gained two seats (in Alabama and Louisiana) due to anti-gerrymandering measures, while Republicans gained three seats (in North Carolina) and Democrats at least one (in New York) due to new gerrymanders. While Democrats flipped three seats in New York, certainly not all of them were because of gerrymanders, especially Laura Gillen's victory over Republican incumbent Anthony D'Esposito in NY-4. Pundits generally agreed NY-22 was gerrymandered to unseat Republican incumbent Brandon Williams, while it's unclear what impact the new maps had on Marc Molinaro's defeat in NY-19.⁴⁴ Overall, this amounts to a net zero impact of redistricting between 2022 and 2024. This isn't to say that gerrymandering is not a problem; it's just that it doesn't explain why Republicans were able to hold the House.

⁴⁴ Michael Macagnone, "New York adopts congressional map that benefits Democrats," *Roll Call*, February 28, 2024, <https://rollcall.com/2024/02/28/new-york-adopts-congressional-map-that-benefits-democrats/>.

Even though they're not perfect, independent commissions might still be the best solution for now to address gerrymandering. The California Congressional map is far less beneficial to Democrats than it could be in an extreme gerrymander. Look at Illinois and Oregon for extreme Democratic gerrymanders, and Florida and Texas for extreme Republican ones. In my opinion, the true solution is to massively increase the size of the House.

Chapter 8: High Turnout Benefits Trump

As I explained at the beginning of this analysis, conventional wisdom dictates that high turnout benefits Democrats. A naive comparison of the nationwide popular vote in 2020 and 2024 strongly supports this narrative, as Biden won the high-turnout election while Harris lost the low-turnout election. Both parties have tended to believe this narrative, leading Democrats generally to favor making voter registration easier and Republicans to oppose it, usually under the guise of election security concerns.

Nevada provides an excellent case study to challenge these assumptions. In 2020, Nevada implemented an automatic voter registration system with support from Democrats and opposition from Republicans, including then-Attorney General and future failed Senate candidate Adam Laxalt. However, many elections analysts dismissed the move altogether as inconsequential, since adding low-propensity voters to the rolls and mailing them all ballots hasn't been shown to motivate them to actually submit those ballots. Nevada has historically had turnout below the national average, including in 2020 (64.3% compared to 66.4% nationwide). Those same elections analysts predicted that trend to continue in 2024, even with automatic registration.⁴⁵

They were wrong. Turnout in Nevada increased to 65.8% while it fell to 63.9% nationwide. Nevada's most prominent pundit, Jon Ralston, noticed this trend in the early voting data and predicted it would benefit Harris, enough to drag her over the top for a victory.⁴⁶ Here were the actual results, statewide and in Clark County, which accounts for nearly 75% of the state's population:

⁴⁵ Haajrah Gilani, "Nevada's voter rolls are growing, yet experts forecast turnout to drop," *Las Vegas Sun*, July 7, 2024, <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2024/jul/07/nevadas-voter-rolls-are-growing-yet-experts-foreca/>.

⁴⁶ Jon Ralston, "Editor Jon Ralston's 2024 Nevada election predictions," *The Nevada Independent*, November 4, 2024, <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/editor-jon-ralstons-2024-nevada-election-predictions>.

Nevada

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	669,890 (47.7%)	751,205 (50.6%)	+81,315 (+2.9%)
Democratic	703,486 (50.1%)	705,197 (47.5%)	+1,711 (-2.6%)

Total Swing: R +179,604 (+5.5%)

Clark County, NV

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	430,930 (44.3%)	493,052 (47.8%)	+62,122 (+3.5%)
Democratic	521,852 (53.7%)	520,187 (50.4%)	-1,665 (-3.3%)

Total Swing: R +63,787 (+6.8%)

In a result that completely defies conventional wisdom and shatters the long-held, bipartisan narrative about higher turnout benefiting Democrats, Trump absolutely dominated among newly registered voters. The Trump campaign's strategy to target low-propensity voters, including and especially independents, paid off completely. While he didn't win Clark County outright (no Republican has since Bush in 1988), his narrowing of his margin of defeat by 63,787 votes both exceeds Biden's entire 2020 statewide margin of victory and Trump's own 2024 margin of victory.

Nevada Presidential Election, Broken by Clark County vs. Non-Clark County

Stat	Votes
Trump's 2020 Margin of Defeat	-33,596
Trump's 2024 Swing in Clark County	+63,787
Trump's 2024 Swing Everywhere Else	+15,817
Trump's 2024 Margin of Victory	+46,008

Clark County, home to the Las Vegas Strip, is fiercely independent. Las Vegas was one of the nation's largest cities with an independent mayor, Carolyn Goodman, from 2011 to 2024. Its population has a history of political disengagement, but the Trump campaign leveraged this to its benefit. It understood that workers in Las Vegas's bustling service industries are struggling with the very issues that Trump was running on: crime, job and wage losses due to immigration, and especially the economy, with his promise to abolish taxes on tips being particularly impactful. These low-propensity voters, of all races and ethnicities, union and non-union alike, turned out for Trump in massive numbers, delivering him the state.

Part of the Trump campaign's get-out-the-vote efforts was a complete embrace of early and absentee voting. It's a marked shift from 2020, when Trump filed suit against Nevada's automatic voter registration policy. JD Vance said it best while campaigning at Treasure Island on the Strip: "We're now in a world where early voting, mail-in voting, Election Day voting, these are all the methods that we have to vote. And if Kamala Harris's team is using everything and we're only using one of those methods of voting, then we're gonna get killed".⁴⁷ As I explained at the beginning of this analysis, research has consistently shown that the key to increasing turnout isn't making voting easier; it's getting voters engaged. But the two go hand-in-hand, for the simple reason that *discouraging* voters from using all the available means of voting does nothing to promote voter engagement. It's an alienating message that

⁴⁷ Haajrah Gilani, "REVERSING COURSE ON EARLY AND MAIL VOTING MESSAGING HELPED PROPEL TRUMP TO VICTORY IN NEVADA," *Las Vegas Weekly*, December 5, 2024, <https://lasvegasweekly.com/news/2024/dec/05/reversing-course-early-mail-voting-propel-trump/>.

detracts from whatever policy agenda a candidate's pushing. For this reason, I argue that the Trump campaign's rejection of early and absentee voting in 2020 was the most insanely stupid campaign strategy that any presidential nominee has adopted this century, if not in all of American history. Imagine thinking that telling people not to vote is going to convince anyone to vote for you! In the words of JD Vance, Trump in 2020 "[got] killed" by a senile candidate running a basement campaign in a completely winnable election, and then had the guts to claim that he actually won.

Trump's victory in Nevada can be contrasted with Republican Sam Brown's defeat in the concurrent Senate election. This was the most surprising Senate election result to me this cycle, since incumbent Jacky Rosen is only a freshman and not especially prominent.



Nevada President vs. Senate Comparison

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	751,205 (50.6%)	677,046 (46.2%)	-74,159 (-4.4%)
Democratic	705,197 (47.5%)	701,105 (47.9%)	-4,092 (+0.4%)

Total Difference: Rosen +70,067 (+4.8%)

The table shows that both Brown and Rosen ran behind Trump and Harris in terms of total votes. Much of the difference is attributable to “None of these candidates” receiving 24,755 (1.7%) more votes in the Senate election than the presidential election, showing both Senate candidates are relatively unpopular. But Brown ran behind Trump way more than Rosen ran behind Harris. The low-propensity and independent voters drawn to Trump were not also drawn to Brown, despite Brown’s positioning of himself as a Trumpist candidate. The Rosen campaign, Republican strategists, and Nevada-based pundits alike seem to agree that Brown never appealed to voters on the issues they cared about.⁴⁸ Rosen’s winning vote share of 47.9% is certainly no indicator of a terrific campaign, so in the end, what really happened in Nevada was that a generic incumbent running a typical campaign defeated a bad challenger running a bad campaign.

⁴⁸ Gabby Birenbaum, “How Democrat Jacky Rosen won Nevada’s Senate race in a Trump year,” *The Nevada Independent*, November 17, 2024, <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/how-democrat-jacky-rosen-won-nevadas-senate-race-in-a-trump-year>.

Chapter 9: The “Democracy” Issue

In Nevada and the other swing states, Democrats may have been complacent in automatically assuming that higher turnout would benefit them. Harris’s campaign was particularly guilty of lacking any sort of coherent policy message at all. Unnamed Democratic operatives defended Harris by pointing out that her campaign only began in July, tacitly blaming Biden for setting her up in a horrible place.⁴⁹ That would be a valid complaint if Harris openly stated her intentions to depart from Biden’s policies, but when pressed on what she would have done differently from Biden, she answered “not a thing”.⁵⁰ It seems that the Harris campaign’s main strategies were to ride the enthusiasm bump from her late entry into the race (remember the “politics of joy”?), rely on celebrity endorsements, and attack Trump as a convicted felon and threat to democracy. The first strategy worked somewhat, as she managed to minimize her losses in the swing states (but obviously not nearly enough to win any except New Hampshire). The second one backfired miserably, leaving her campaign millions in debt. But it’s the third strategy that now needs some lengthier discussion.

According to the Edison exit poll, Harris won 80% of voters who said “democracy” was their top issue. Her problem is that these voters only represented 34% of the electorate.⁵¹ I find it a bit rich for Harris to present herself as some sort of guardian of democracy. I understand that the Trump Administration tried to throw the opposition party’s main candidate in jail... oh wait, that was the Biden–Harris Administration. There’s also the fact that Kamala Harris did not receive a single vote for the Democratic nomination. In no way was her selection as the nominee a democratic process. She was the candidate chosen by cabal in a manner unseen since 1968. It’s especially worse when one considers that Democratic Party officials explicitly stated that the DNC would not facilitate a primary process for candidates to challenge Joe Biden. As the incumbent Democratic president who has stated his desire to run for reelection, Joe Biden, so they insisted, was the Democratic nominee.⁵² There’s nothing suspicious, then,

⁴⁹ Alex Gangitano and Al Weaver, “Democrats defend Harris for avoiding policy,” *The Hill*, August 29, 2024, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4852620-democrats-kamala-harris-campaign-approach-policy/>.

⁵⁰ On *The View* as clipped by the *Washington Examiner*

⁵¹ Trump, on the other hand, won 83% of voters whose top issue was the economy or immigration, which made up a collective 44% of the electorate.

⁵² Symone Sanders on *Morning Joe* as clipped by *National Review*

when the same officials said Biden must drop out even if it's against his own desire to keep running, even though 87% of voting Democrats voted for him to be their nominee. Rank-and-file Democrats, especially supporters of Dean Phillips and Marianne Williamson (Robert Kennedy Jr. obviously took his campaign in a much different direction, that I'll address in Chapter 17), are right to be outraged by the DNC's hypocrisy. Everyone's admitting now what many progressives were saying in 2023, that Biden was far too senile to ever have run in the first place.

For all of Trump's faults with trying to overturn the 2020 election, one of the most inexcusable and dangerous actions of any president in American history, Trump ran in and decisively won a competitive Republican primary against genuine opposition, and then proceeded to win the general election fairly, not just winning the Electoral College but also the popular vote. Democracy was well preserved in this election.

That being said, the 34% of the electorate who ranked democracy as their top issue is still significant, resulting in gains for Kamala Harris in some states. Like Las Vegas, Colorado Springs is a large city with lots of independent voters. But it wasn't this way until recently. The city has long been an evangelical Mecca (or evangelical Vatican, if you prefer) of sorts, being headquarters to Focus on the Family, Young Life, and The Navigators among many influential Christian organizations. With its white evangelical base, Colorado Springs remains one of the most conservative major cities in the country, as El Paso County has voted for the Republican presidential candidate in every election since 1964. But the city has been rapidly growing in the last few decades, making it less and less red. In 2023, independent Yemi Mobolade became the first ever non-Republican mayor of Colorado Springs. He's a true independent who did not publicly endorse a candidate in either the 2020 or the 2024 presidential elections.

El Paso County, CO

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	202,828 (53.5%)	203,933 (53.5%)	+1,105 (0%)
Democratic	161,941 (42.7%)	166,597 (43.7%)	+4,656 (+1%)

Total Swing: D +3,551 (+1%)

Politico ran an excellent [feature](#) of Colorado Springs in June 2024. The independent voters moving there are largely young professionals, a demographic that leans liberal but tends to be fed up with the two-party system. Although much has been made of Trump's newfound success among young voters, especially in connection with his podcasting strategy, the exit polls show that Harris still won every age cohort under 45, and they were unlikely to have swung the election. Young voters have been shifting Colorado Springs left ever since the Obama era, and that trend continued in 2024.

Harris's message of democracy and stability were effective in the booming, prosperous city of Colorado Springs. Colorado Springs ranks third in *U.S. News and World Report's* [rankings](#) of the best places to live in the United States. For fun, let's also check the election results in the place at the top of the Livability.com [rankings](#). Ranked first and fourth are Carmel and Fishers, Indiana, two rapidly growing suburbs of Indianapolis in Hamilton County.

Hamilton County, IN

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	101,587 (52.4%)	102,318 (52%)	+731 (-0.4%)
Democratic	88,390 (45.5%)	90,394 (45.9%)	+2,004 (+0.4%)

Total Swing: D +1,273 (+0.8%)

We likewise see a gain for Harris in a booming, desirable area, even as Democratic turnout collapsed statewide in non-competitive Indiana. Harris's 45.9% was the greatest share of the vote that any Democratic presidential candidate has ever received in Hamilton County. The reason why she performed relatively well in such desirable places as Colorado Springs and Carmel was perhaps best summarized by Ron Weinberg, the chair of the Larimer County, Colorado, Republican Party: voters in such places aren't "hurting enough to vote a different way" from issues like inflation and crime.⁵³ Independent and swing voters there are instead turned off by Trump's personality and legal issues.

Larimer County, CO

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	91,489 (40.8%)	89,680 (39.8%)	-1,809 (-1%)
Democratic	126,120 (56.2%)	129,376 (57.4%)	+3,256 (+1.2%)

Total Swing: D +5,065 (+2.2%)

Larimer County was another such desirable county that turned toward Harris. Like Colorado as a whole, Larimer County was a Republican stronghold until Obama won it in 2008, and it's gone Democratic ever since. Its largest city of Fort Collins was [ranked](#) by Livability.com as the country's best place to live in 2020. Its leftward swing has also been driven in large part by Colorado State University's liberal student and faculty body. While Trump nearly matched Harris's support among voters under 24 generally, college students still favored Harris overwhelmingly. However, the gender differential is massive, with Trump seemingly winning among men but Harris winning women two-to-one.⁵⁴ I expect abortion and student debt relief are the key issues favoring Harris among young women. Unfortunately for

⁵³ Sady Swanson, "Larimer County's Democrat candidates win on Election Day with less money in their pockets," The *Coloradoan*, November 13, 2022, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2022/11/13/larimer-county-democrats-defeat-republicans-despite-less-fundraising/69637316007/>.

⁵⁴ Jane Nam, "College Student Voters Favor Harris to Trump, 52% vs. 39%, *BestColleges*, 2024, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/students-favor-harris-ahead-of-2024-election/>.

Harris, that's pretty much the only demographic where abortion carried her.

Colorado

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	1,364,607 (41.9%)	1,377,441 (43.2%)	+12,834 (+1.3%)
Democratic	1,804,352 (55.4%)	1,728,159 (54.1%)	-76,193 (-1.3%)

Total Swing: R +89,027 (+2.6%)

Even as half of all Colorado counties shifted left in 2024, especially El Paso and Larimer, the state as a whole still shifted right. It's due primarily to decreased turnout, especially in the Denver suburbs.

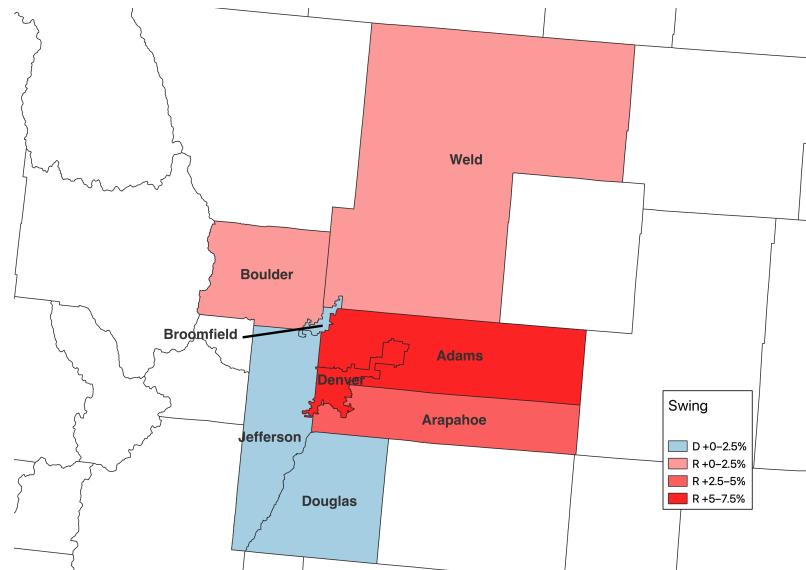
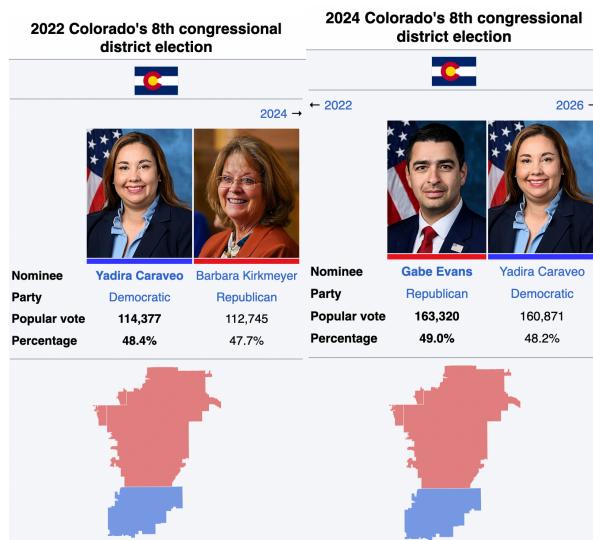


Figure 10: Denver Area Swing⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Several outlying, rural counties in the Rockies are excluded due to their small population. Fittingly, the county with the largest Democratic shift, the consolidated city-county of Broomfield, is sixth in Livability.com's best places to live rankings.

Republican gains in the Denver suburbs were most significant in determining the outcome of the House election in Colorado's 8th Congressional District. The purple district stretches from the northeastern Denver suburbs in Adams County, like Thornton and Brighton, north to the satellite city of Greeley in Weld County. Adams County is now a blue county, while Weld County is long-time Republican. Democratic incumbent Yadira Caraveo was predicted to win reelection, but in what, in my opinion, amounts to the greatest Republican upset in any House election this cycle, Republican challenger Gabe Evans flipped the seat.



CO-8 House Election Results by County

County	Type	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Swing
Adams, CO	Suburban	D +14.3%	D +10.6%	R +3.7%
Weld, CO	Satellite	R +20.7%	R +18.6%	D +2.1%
Larimer, CO	Satellite ⁵⁶	R +10.2%	R +11.1%	R +0.9%

⁵⁶ A very small portion of the district lies in Larimer County that's too small to impact the outcome.

Evans's victory was fueled by a narrower margin of defeat in suburban Adams County. He didn't win the county, but he kept it close enough so his large margin of victory in Weld County could carry him across. It seems that the Caraveo campaign took Adams County for granted and focused primarily on increasing support in Weld County, which was effective to some extent as she did narrow her own margin of defeat there. The issue was that suburban voters shifted right for the first time in a decade. Evans's immigration-based campaign message succeeded in a district that's 39% Latino. In a cycle where Republicans retained the House by only two seats, this upset was perhaps the most critical.

Chapter 10: The Greatest Testament to Trump's Multicultural, Multiracial Coalition

So far in our tour of the states, we've covered lots of regional trends in swing states and non-swing states alike, but in these next few sections we'll focus specifically on the most critical swing states that actually swung the election. In Chapter 2, I identified those states as Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, with Pennsylvania being the tipping-point state.

But before I say anything about Pennsylvania, let's look at neighboring New York. New York is essentially Pennsylvania magnified. The Greater New York City megaregion overlaps with Greater Philadelphia, creating a single line of continuous development along the Northeast Corridor. Upstate New York and Western Pennsylvania, on the Allegheny Plateau, were together once the nation's leading industrial centers, and are now the epitome of the post-industrial decline typical of the "Rust Belt". They were by far the two most important states in the Electoral College in the first century-and-a-half of American politics. No president won the election without carrying at least one of New York and Pennsylvania until Woodrow Wilson's upset win in 1916. Since then, their influence has waned as the American economic and population base has moved South and West, but they remain the fourth- and fifth-largest states in the country.

New York

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	3,251,997 (37.7%)	3,578,899 (43.3%)	+326,902 (+5.6%)
Democratic	5,244,886 (60.9%)	4,619,195 (55.9%)	-625,691 (-5%)

Total Swing: R +952,593 (+10.6%)

By percentage, New York had the largest rightward swing of any state this election. It follows a 2022 gubernatorial election where Republican Lee Zeldin, a true conservative and not an Eastern Establishment Republican in the tradition of George Pataki, Nelson Rockefeller,

or Thomas Dewey, came within 7% of winning. New York's rapid swing to the right is driven primarily by New York City.

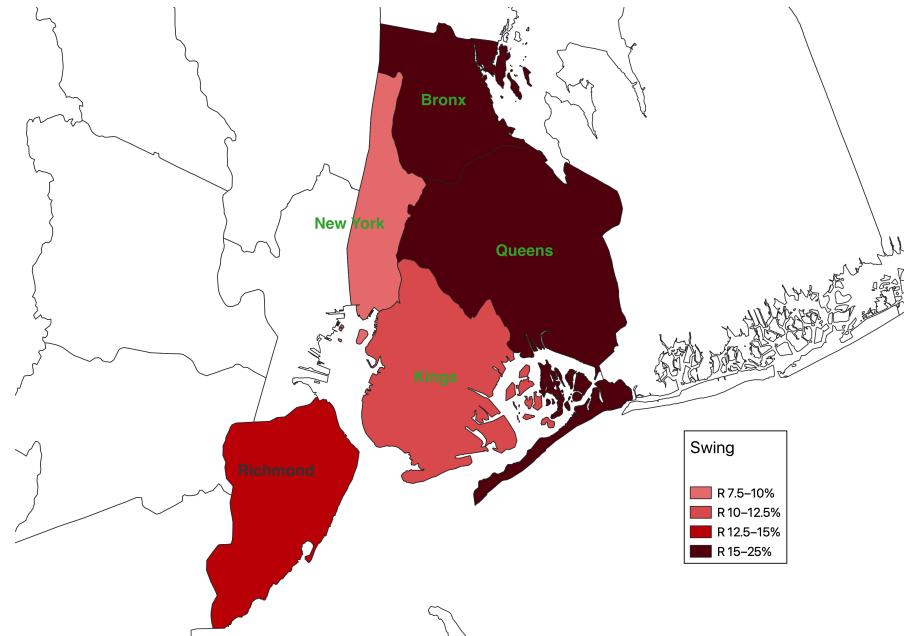


Figure 11: New York City Swing

New York City

County (Borough)	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Swing
Bronx	D +287,634 (+67.5%)	D +163,496 (+45%)	R +124,138 (+22.5%)
Kings (Brooklyn)	D +500,538 (+54.8%)	D +367,301 (+43.3%)	D +133,237 (+11.5%)
New York (Manhattan)	D +517,855 (+74.4%)	D +419,861 (+64.2%)	R +97,994 (+9.8%)
Queens	D +356,373 (+45.2%)	D +172,654 (+24.2%)	R +183,719 (+21%)

County (Borough)	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Swing
Richmond (Staten Island)	R +32,323 (+14.9%)	R +58,806 (+29.5%)	R +26,483 (+14.6%)

Total Swing: R +565,571

For a candidate dubbed as racist and xenophobic to have his largest swings anywhere in the country be in the nation's most diverse and multicultural, if not outright *liberal*, city is absolutely astounding as it is narrative-crushing. My analysis of Trump's gains in the Los Angeles area carry over completely to New York. As a megacity with massive economic disparities between the classes, whose working population has suffered mightily from inflation and crime, Trump's economic message has a special appeal. But Trump's New York gains far exceed those in any other megacity, even when adjusted for demographics. Bronx and Queens Counties had the fourth- and fifth-largest swings of any county in the country by percentage. As previously mentioned, nine of the top twelve counties are supermajority Latino counties on the Southern border.⁵⁷ While both have large Latino populations, the Bronx and Queens are far more diverse, so it's not just Latino voters driving the change. Moreover, Brooklyn is less Latino than the national average, and yet it still had an 11.5% swing to the right.

New York Mayor Eric Adams blames Democratic losses on Progressives for focusing on cultural issues and not the economy. Progressive activists blame Adams for feeding into Republican narratives of New York being a city with out-of-control crime committed by illegal aliens. They're likely all right, as Trump's top three issues nationwide were the economy, immigration, and crime. But they're missing the fact that Trump's support increased among not just white and Latino working-class voters, but among every racial group. The city has by far the largest Asian-American population in the United States, primarily concentrated in Queens and Brooklyn. In wake of the first Trump Administration's hostility toward China and the rise in violence toward Asians during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Democrats held

⁵⁷ Along with Bronx and Queens, the other top-twelve county not on the Southern border is nearby Passaic County, NJ. Hudson County, NJ, is also not far behind.

Trump responsible.⁵⁸ What they perhaps forgot is that many Asian-Americans share Trump's hostility toward the current Chinese government (which is why many are in the United States to begin with), and that the candidate who's positioned himself as tough-on-crime is Donald Trump. Furthermore, Asian culture is much more conservative than the culture of white liberals, arguably even outflanking the Republican Party to the right on social issues. Asian-Americans, for one, have been the leaders in the fight against affirmative action.

The NYC Election Atlas provides an [interactive map](#) comparing the election results in each New York City electoral district from 2020 to 2024. There are some electoral districts with swings of over 50%. Some districts that Joe Biden won with 75% of the vote went for Trump. The common denominator of these districts is a heavy Asian-American population. Here is a sampling:

Electoral District 54 (Corona and Elmhurst, Queens)

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	183 (26.7%)	324 (54%)	+141 (+27.3%)
Democratic	502 (73.3%)	276 (46%)	-226 (-27.3%)

Total Swing: R +367 (+54.6%)

Electoral District 44 (Bath Beach and Gravesend, Brooklyn)

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	312 (40.5%)	608 (68.2%)	+296 (+27.7%)
Democratic	458 (59.5%)	283 (31.8%)	-175 (-27.7%)

Total Swing: R +471 (+55.4%)

⁵⁸ Jennifer Zheng and Joseph P. Zompetti, "'I'm not a virus': Asian hate in Donald Trump's rhetoric," *Asian Journal of Communication* 33, 5 (2023): 470-503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2023.2246509>.

As opposed to traditional Chinatowns like the one in Manhattan and Flushing in Queens, the Chinatown in Elmhurst is mostly populated by recent immigrants. Since the 1990s, the Chinatown has expanded into neighboring Corona and grown to attract numerous other ethnicities, particularly Southeast Asians. Likewise, the Asian population only recently began growing in the adjacent neighborhoods of Bath Beach, Bensonhurst, and Gravesend along Gravesend Bay in Brooklyn. These neighborhoods were predominantly settled by Italian-Americans in the early 20th century before welcoming Asians of all ethnicities in the 1990s. Like Elmhurst in Queens, this area is not the original Chinatown in Brooklyn, which would be Sunset Park. Whereas the traditional Asian enclaves of Flushing, Sunset Park, and the Chinatown in Manhattan all saw substantial movement toward Trump, nearly double their borough averages, they paled in comparison to these newer enclaves. Many of these recent immigrants came to the United States leaving behind authoritarian dictatorships, but bringing a culture of hard work and discipline. They tended to favor tough-on-crime policies and take conservative views on social issues even when voting for Democrats, but with the rampant inflation of the Biden era and good memories of the economy under Trump, that was enough for many of them to vote for Trump.

According to the nationwide exit poll, Trump won 40% of the Asian-American vote, up from 36% in 2020. This is a modest but not insignificant bump. Trump's supermassive gains among Asians seem to be isolated to New York City, which makes sense given the unique crime and economic situation there, and to a lesser extent Hawaii. Most of the recently established Asian enclaves across the United States tend to be in more suburban locations, which have been more favorable to Democrats of late. This shift also seems isolated to Trump and not down-ballot Republicans. The two best performing House Democrats in comparison to Harris were Ed Case in Hawaii's 1st Congressional District and Grace Meng in New York's 6th Congressional District, both of which are plurality Asian. Only in New York is there such ethnic and cultural diversity where Trump's economic message appeals simultaneously to voters of all races, who are all impacted by the same issues. Trump's massive gains in New York City are the greatest testament to his successful forging of a multicultural, multiracial coalition.

Trump's gains in New York extend beyond New York City. While New York City dominates the state's politics and essentially ensures Democratic victories statewide, Upstate New York with its industrial history has always been rather favorable to Trump. Erie County, home to Buffalo, saw the fourth-largest swing in favor of Trump by any county in his 2016 victory. Buffalo is a quintessential Rust Belt city. Located at the end of the Erie Canal, the most consequential infrastructure project in American economic history that enabled the industrial development of the Midwest, Buffalo was the 10th-largest city in the whole country as late as the 1910 Census. But since peaking at a population of 580,132 at the 1950 Census, its population has fallen by half. It was in places like this where Trump's original 2016 economic message, of opposition to free trade and bringing jobs back to America, was most effective.

Erie County, NY

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	197,552 (41.7%)	204,774 (44.8%)	+7,222 (+3.1%)
Democratic	267,270 (56.5%)	248,651 (54.5%)	-18,619 (-2%)

Total Swing: R +25,841 (+5.1%)

While most major cities in noncompetitive states, such as Seattle and Denver, saw reduced turnout for both Trump and Harris, Trump's vote totals increased in most post-industrial Rust Belt cities. This shows that his original populist appeal is still strong, even with his loss of Michigan and Pennsylvania in 2020.

Chapter 11: Trump's Working-Class Coalition Delivers Him Pennsylvania

We've now reached the point where we'll examine the trends that led to Trump's victory in each of the three most critical states. We start with Pennsylvania, the tipping-point state in this election that has emerged as the most important swing state in presidential politics.

Pennsylvania

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	3,378,263 (48.8%)	3,543,308 (50.4%)	+165,045 (+1.6%)
Democratic	3,459,923 (50%)	3,423,042 (48.6%)	-36,881 (-1.4%)

Total Swing: R +201,926 (+3%)

Earlier, I described New York as a magnified Pennsylvania. That's because the same trends in New York largely played out in Pennsylvania, just to a much smaller magnitude. As a swing state, turnout in Pennsylvania was up from 2020, unlike New York where it was much lower. As it did in all the other swing states except Arizona where the trend was absent, Pennsylvania's higher turnout allowed Harris to keep the margins close. Since the Philadelphia area straddles the New Jersey border, we have a natural experiment to see the impact of turnout on Democratic losses. We compare Camden County, NJ, with Philadelphia County, PA, across the Delaware River.

Camden County, NJ

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	86,207 (32.5%)	87,767 (35.4%)	+1,560 (+2.9%)
Democratic	175,065 (65.9%)	155,522 (62.8%)	-19,543 (-3.1%)

Total Swing: R +21,103 (+6%)

Philadelphia County, PA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	132,740 (17.9%)	144,311 (20%)	+11,571 (+2.1%)
Democratic	603,790 (81.4%)	568,571 (78.8%)	-35,219 (-2.6%)

Total Swing: R +46,790 (+4.7%)

Note that Camden County's population increased slightly between 2020 and 2024, while Philadelphia's population fell by some 50,000. We see that in noncompetitive New Jersey, Harris's losses completely outweigh Trump's gains, while in competitive Pennsylvania, her losses when adjusted for population size were more limited.

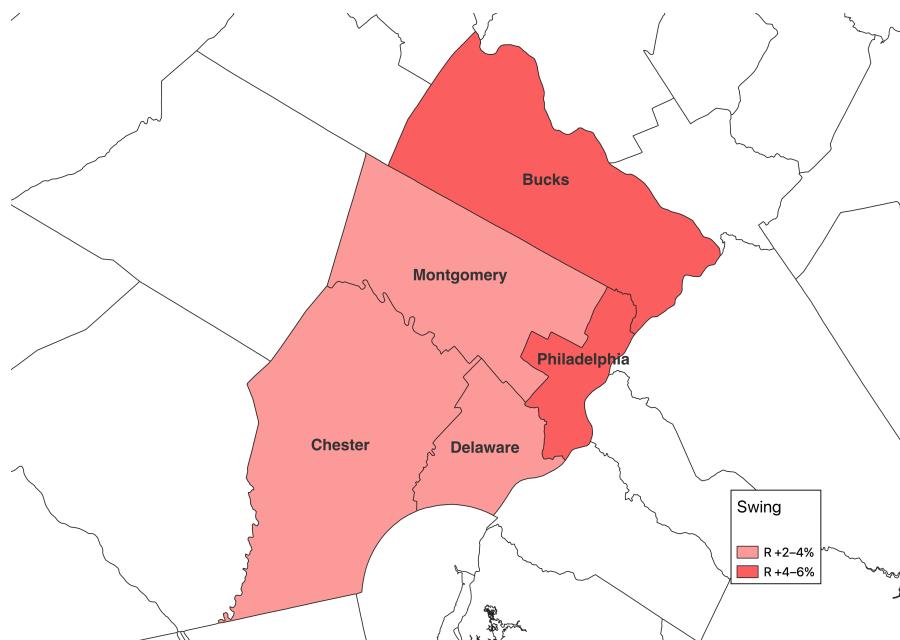


Figure 12: Philadelphia Area Swing

Philadelphia Area⁵⁹

County	Type	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Change
Philadelphia, PA	Urban	D +471,050	D +424,260	R +46,790
Delaware, PA	Suburban	D +87,891	D +77,903	R +9,988
Bucks, PA	Suburban	D +17,345	R +291	R +17,636
Montgomery, PA	Suburban	D +134,051	D +118,792	R +15,259
Chester, PA	Exurban	D +53,807	D +46,982	R +6,825

Total Swing: R +96,498

Pennsylvania Presidential Election, Broken by Philadelphia Area vs. Non-Philadelphia Area

Stat	Votes
Trump's 2020 Margin of Defeat	-81,660
Trump's 2024 Swing in the Philadelphia Area	+96,498
Trump's 2024 Swing Everywhere Else	+105,428
Trump's 2024 Margin of Victory	+120,266

From these data, we see that Trump swung enough votes in the Philadelphia area alone to overcome his 2020 margin of defeat in Pennsylvania. Even as Pennsylvania moved left in 2020, Philadelphia itself (not its suburbs) actually shifted right, largely due to his increased support among black voters (8% to 12% nationally from 2016 to 2020). In 2024, Trump's share of the black vote only increased to 13%, but that breaks down as 21% of black men (up from 19% in 2020) and 7% of black women (down from 9%). Thus while black voters moving right is part of the explanation for Philadelphia's rightward shift, it's not the main reason.

⁵⁹ The map and table only display the core parts of the Philadelphia Area within Pennsylvania, excluding those in New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland.

The consequence of Trump's multicultural, multiracial, working-class coalition is that it's not race that determines elections. It's socioeconomic status (but race can be a proxy). While Trump improved among all income levels in Philadelphia, his largest improvements came among those making under \$75,000 a year. He still lost these voters overwhelmingly, only receiving about 15% of their vote, but it's the *shift* that matters, not the absolute numbers. That 15% in 2024 is up from 12% in 2020. Low-income voters are also more likely to be Latino and lack a college degree, two groups that also saw large gains for Trump.⁶⁰

The story of Pennsylvania is the same story as the country as a whole: Trump successfully forged a multicultural, multiracial, working-class coalition to win the election, focusing on reducing inflation, curbing immigration, and a tough-on-crime approach. This is the single most important reason for his win, having determined the outcome in Nevada and Pennsylvania and giving him success in America's megacities that no Republican has come close to in recent memory. Indeed, Trump's 19.9% in Philadelphia is the strongest Republican performance there since Bush in 1992. Philadelphia County was the most critical county in the most critical state this election.

All that being said about Philadelphia, Trump still would have won Pennsylvania off the strength of his gains everywhere else in the state. In the sixty-two counties not in the Philadelphia area, he gained an average of 1,700 votes in each one. There's quite a bit of variation here, of course, ranging from a Kamala Harris gain in Cumberland County (the western "suburbs" of Harrisburg, if you can call them suburbs) to a 7,884-vote gain for Trump in Luzerne County (Wilkes-Barre).

⁶⁰ Chris A. Williams, Stephen Stirling, and Anna Orso, "These Philadelphia voters went for Donald Trump in bigger numbers than ever before," *The Inquirer*, November 12, 2024, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/donald-trump-gains-philadelphia-voters-20241112.html>.

Cumberland County, PA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	77,212 (54.5%)	80,267 (54.1%)	+3,055 (-0.4%)
Democratic	62,645 (44%)	66,255 (44.6%)	+4,010 (+0.6%)

Total Swing: D +955 (+1%)

Luzerne County, PA

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	86,929 (56.7%)	92,444 (59.2%)	+5,515 (+2.5%)
Democratic	64,873 (42.3%)	62,504 (40%)	-2,369 (-2.3%)

Total Swing: R +7,884 (+4.8%)

The leftward shift of Cumberland County was predicted prior to the election, which was largely attributed to small-town suburban voters being turned off by Trump's abrasive style.⁶¹ Democratic efforts to turn out the vote in South Central Pennsylvania (the Chambersburg, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York areas) paid off, as Harris generally minimized her losses throughout the region.

Luzerne County, on the other hand, has long been the heart of Trump Country. It lies in Pennsylvania's Coal Region, home to the world's largest known anthracite deposits. In the 19th and 20th centuries, its coal was critical for fueling the Industrial Revolution in America. But as heavy industry left the Midwest and the coal mines closed, the county and broader region have fallen into the loss and decay typical of the Rust Belt. Like Pennsylvania as a whole, it voted for the Democratic presidential nominee in every election from 1992 to 2012,

⁶¹ Aliya Schneider and Assem Shukla, "Suburbs of small cities like Harrisburg are shifting blue — and could help Kamala Harris win Pa." *The Inquirer*, September 9, 2024, <https://www.inquirer.com/politics/election/harrisburg-suburbs-voting-trends-2024-election-trump-harris-20240909.html>.

before swinging 15% in favor of Trump in 2016. Luzerne County gave him the largest swing by total votes of any Pennsylvania county in the 2016 election, making it then the most critical county in the most critical state. Trump has continued to dominate since then, promising to “drill, baby, drill” to revitalize the region’s economy. The blue-collar workers of the post-industrial Midwest were the first members of Trump’s working-class coalition, and they’re very much still a key part.

Chapter 12: Michigan's Arab Revolt

Even though the president has nearly unilateral power to set the nation's foreign policy, it is very seldom a key issue in presidential elections. According to the exit poll, only 4% of voters had foreign policy as their top issue. But Trump won those voters with 56% of the vote. Nowhere was this more relevant than Michigan, home to the nation's largest Arab-American population. There were early warning signs that this historically Democratic-leaning demographic might turn against Biden in wake of his unconditional support for Israel in its wars in Gaza and Lebanon, namely 101,623 votes for Uncommitted in the Michigan Democratic Primary. This began the Uncommitted National Movement and the Abandon Biden movement across the country. After Biden exited the race, the Uncommitted National Movement tacitly endorsed Harris (more precisely, it anti-endorsed all the other candidates) after she began calling for a ceasefire. On the other hand, the Abandon Biden movement evolved into the Abandon Harris movement, encouraging voters not to vote for Harris.

Michigan

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	2,649,852 (47.8%)	2,816,636 (49.7%)	+166,784 (+1.9%)
Democratic	2,804,040 (50.6%)	2,736,533 (48.3%)	-67,507 (-2.3%)

Total Swing: R +234,291 (+4.2%)

The story of Michigan can mostly be told through the three core counties of the Detroit area: Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb, where almost all of the state's Arab population lives. I say mostly instead of entirely, because the total swing in these counties was actually insufficient for Trump to overcome his 2020 margin of defeat.

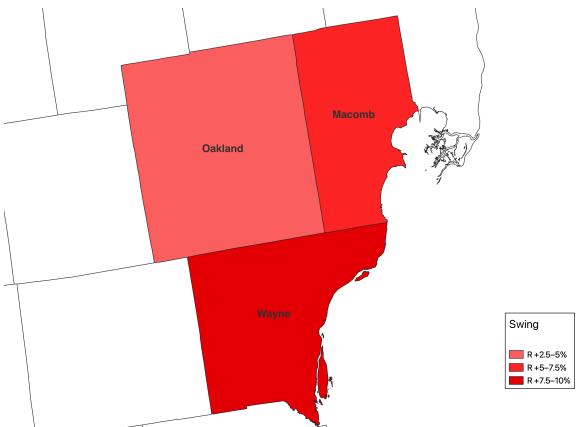


Figure 13: Core Detroit Area Swing

Core Detroit Area

County	Type	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Change
Wayne, MI	Urban	D +332,617	D +248,172	R +84,445
Oakland, MI	Suburban	D +108,177	D +81,728	R +26,449
Macomb, MI	Suburban	R +39,911	R +69,683	R +29,772

Total Swing: R +140,666

Michigan Presidential Election, Broken by Wayne/Oakland/Macomb vs. Non-Wayne/Oakland/Macomb

Stat	Votes
Trump's 2020 Margin of Defeat	-154,188
Trump's 2024 Swing in Wayne/Oakland/Macomb	+140,666
Trump's 2024 Swing Everywhere Else	+93,625
Trump's 2024 Margin of Victory	+80,103

Wayne/Oakland/Macomb Counties Combined

Party	2020 Votes	2024 Votes	Change
Republican	854,387	911,311	+56,924
Democratic	1,255,270	1,171,528	-83,742

Total Swing: R +140,666

Everywhere Else in Michigan

Party	2020 Votes	2024 Votes	Change
Republican	1,795,465	1,905,325	+109,860
Democratic	1,548,770	1,565,005	+16,235

Total Swing: R +93,625

There's a lot to unpack in these data, but everything you really need to know is contained in the change in total votes for the Democratic Party. Everywhere else in Michigan, Harris improved on Biden's performance by 16,235 votes, a product of high turnout with Michigan being a swing state this election. But Harris ran 83,742 votes behind Biden in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties. Trump's total 2024 margin of victory in Michigan was 80,103. This means that if Harris had simply matched Biden's vote total in these Arab-heavy Detroit area counties, then she would have carried the state. When we consider that many Biden 2020 voters voted for Trump in 2024, the number of Biden 2020 voters she needed to retain drops considerably (because we can subtract those votes from Trump's total in addition to adding them to Harris's), to the point where she could still have afforded to run a little behind Biden. Democrats can't blame population loss for Harris's decline. These three counties have only lost a combined total of about 50,000 people between 2020 and 2024, and obviously that total includes Trump supporters and non-voters.

We have to consider that Detroit is not only a major city where Trump's economic message naturally appeals, but also a Rust Belt city famous for its industrial decline. Wayne County, after all, saw the largest shift toward Trump by total votes of any county in the 2016 election. This means that even without the war in Gaza, Trump likely still would have increased his vote totals in Detroit by a lot. But the magnitude of Trump's gains in Wayne County, 9.2%, far exceeds his gains in other Rust Belt counties (Erie County, NY, was at 5.1%). Further considering that Michigan was a competitive state where Democratic turnout was up from 2020, we'd expect even smaller movement toward Trump based solely on Trump's economic messaging. The fact that Trump's gains vastly exceeded those expectations suggests that Arab-Americans were ultimately decisive. The aggregate vote totals for Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties show that many of them simply stayed home or voted for third-party candidates (Jill Stein recorded 2.4% in Wayne County, her best county in the nation). But many voted for Trump. This can be seen from the results in Dearborn, the nation's only majority-Arab city.

Dearborn, MI

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	13,239 (29.4%)	17,796 (43.1%)	+4,557 (+13.7%)
Democratic	30,718 (68.3%)	15,189 (36.7%)	-15,529 (-31.6%)
Green	208 (0.5%)	7,697 (18.6%)	+7,489 (+18.1%)
Other	832 (1.8%)	655 (1.6%)	-177 (-0.2%)

Total Swing: R +20,086 (+45.3%)

Trump has a mixed history with Arabs and the Middle East. On one hand, he famously called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States in his 2016 campaign. On the other hand, he facilitated unprecedented peace negotiations between Israel and several Arab nations in his first term. His messaging in his 2024 campaign was just as mixed, at times criticizing

Biden and Harris for not doing enough to support Israel,⁶² at others blaming Biden for fueling a genocide.⁶³ But what ultimately endeared Michigan's Arab-American voters to Trump was his stated opposition to wars and promise to end the war in Gaza. For all the talk of his having a chaotic, if not directionless foreign policy, Trump did not start any new wars in his first term, the first president not to do so since Carter (RIP). World leaders recognize that the mixed messaging and unpredictability are strategic, meant to keep the world guessing as to his next move.

Between stating her support for every policy of the Biden Administration, failing to make a single campaign appearance in Dearborn, and preventing any Palestinian-American from speaking at the Democratic National Convention, Kamala Harris did nothing to convince voters that she would be the best candidate to handle the war. Instead, she chose to take the complete opposite strategy: campaigning with Liz Cheney, whose father was the architect of America's forever wars in the Middle East, responsible for hundreds of thousands of Arab civilian deaths in Iraq. Dearborn Heights Mayor Bill Bazzi said that Harris appearing alongside Cheney in Michigan was the final straw leading him to endorse Trump.⁶⁴ Democratic elites like Harris may have forgotten that Dick Cheney spearheaded the invasion of Iraq under false pretenses, ushering in the deadliest war of the 21st century. They may have forgotten that Cheney's oil company made billions in contracts from the war. They may have forgotten that he left office with a 13% approval rating. But the world remembers. Our forever wars in the Middle East, not our freedoms and liberties, are the reason why al-Qaeda attacked us in 2001 and why Islamist terrorists continue to do so.⁶⁵ The foreign policy of the Cheneys, using false pretenses to start a war that generates immense profits for their corporation, is nothing short of a textbook example of the corruption of the American war machine. The lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs, not to mention over 4,000 slain American soldiers,

⁶² At the CNN debate as clipped by [Al Jazeera English](#)

⁶³ At a rally as clipped by [Middle East Eye](#)

⁶⁴ Brakkton Booker, "He's an Arab mayor in Michigan. Here's why he's unapologetically pro-Trump." *Politico*, November 5, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/05/donald-trump-bill-bazzi-michigan-gaza-00187395>.

⁶⁵ Osama bin Laden, *Letter to the American People*, November 24, 2002, transcript in *Newsweek*, ed. Giulia Carbonaro, November 17, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/osama-bin-laden-letter-america-transcript-full-1844662>.

mean nothing to the Cheneys. While it was not the most important factor in costing her the election, Harris's choice to embrace Liz Cheney may just be the most obviously insane and easily avoidable mistake of her campaign. Did she, or anyone in her campaign, seriously think that the Cheneys' endorsement would help her win Republican votes?

Dearborn President vs. Representative Comparison

Party	President	Representative	Difference
Republican	17,796 (43.1%)	12,024 (30.1%)	-5,772 (-13%)
Democratic	15,189 (36.7%)	24,832 (62.1%)	+9,643 (+25.4%)

Total Difference: Tlaib +15,235 (+38.4%)

Arab-Americans have not now suddenly become Republicans, even if they may have voted for Trump. While Trump won Dearborn in the presidential election, Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib (D-MI-12) carried the city by 32 points en route to her reelection. Tlaib, who is Palestinian-American, notably did not endorse Harris.

While Trump's largest and most decisive gains came in the Arab-heavy Detroit area, they ultimately weren't enough on their own for him to flip Michigan. Like in Georgia, it was relatively modest gains everywhere else, across the state's rural counties, that carried him over the top. What makes Trump's success across the state somewhat ironic is that Michigan's Republican Party might just be the most incompetent state-level Republican Party in the entire nation, ranging from financial woes to the nomination of horrible candidates across the board like Tudor Dixon for governor and Kristina Karamo for secretary of state in the 2022 midterms. To reward Karamo for failing to concede her 14-point loss, the Michigan Republican Party made her the party chair (she's since been removed). The incompetence was on full display again in Michigan's 2024 Senate election, but in somewhat of a different direction this time. Instead of a diehard stolen election Trumpist, the Republican nomination went to former Representative Mike Rogers, who as Intelligence Committee chair was the

House's foremost proponent of unconstitutional mass warrantless surveillance. The Michigan Democratic Party had a [field day](#) with Rogers's nomination, pointing out his unfavorability with seemingly every faction of the Republican Party, except apparently for Donald Trump himself who for some reason thought it was a good idea to endorse him in the primary. Rogers is a neoconservative in the same vein as the Cheneys, making him completely antithetical to Trump's newfound anti-war voter base. So it comes as no surprise, then, that he ran well behind Trump in his loss to Democrat Elissa Slotkin.

2024 United States Senate election in Michigan



Michigan President vs. Senate Comparison

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	2,816,636 (49.7%)	2,693,680 (48.3%)	-122,956 (-1.4%)
Democratic	2,736,533 (48.3%)	2,712,686 (48.6%)	-23,847 (+0.3%)

Total Difference: Slotkin +99,109 (+1.7%)

Yet just as I criticize the Michigan Republican Party for its horrible candidate selection, it happens that Republicans flipped a House seat in Michigan. It happened in the 7th Congressional District, based in Lansing, which had previously been held by Slotkin.

2022 [edit]

Michigan's 7th congressional district, 2022^[12]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Democratic	Elissa Slotkin (incumbent)	192,809	51.7
Republican	Tom Barrett	172,624	46.3
Libertarian	Leah Dailey	7,275	1.9
Total votes		372,708	100.0
Democratic hold			

2024 [edit]

Michigan's 7th congressional district, 2024^[13]

Party	Candidate	Votes	%
Republican	Tom Barrett	226,694	50.3
Democratic	Curtis Hertel Jr.	209,842	46.6
Libertarian	Leah Dailey	14,226	3.2
Total votes		450,762	100.1
Republican gain from Democratic			

Trump won this district in the presidential race, but by a smaller margin (50–49) than Barrett. Seeing her consistent victories in a red House district (its Cook PVI is R +2) and now statewide in a good year for Republicans, Slotkin is a strong candidate. Unlike Harris, she ran on the economic issues facing voters, touting the industrial jobs brought back to Michigan via the Inflation Reduction Act. Slotkin herself had warned nationwide Democrats about this months before the election, but unfortunately for them, her warnings weren't heeded at the top of the ticket.

If there's one area of Michigan where the state Republican Party's incompetence is costing them massively, it's Northwestern Michigan, specifically the Traverse City area around Grand Traverse Bay. This four-county region had almost all of the counties in the entire state where Harris did better than Biden.

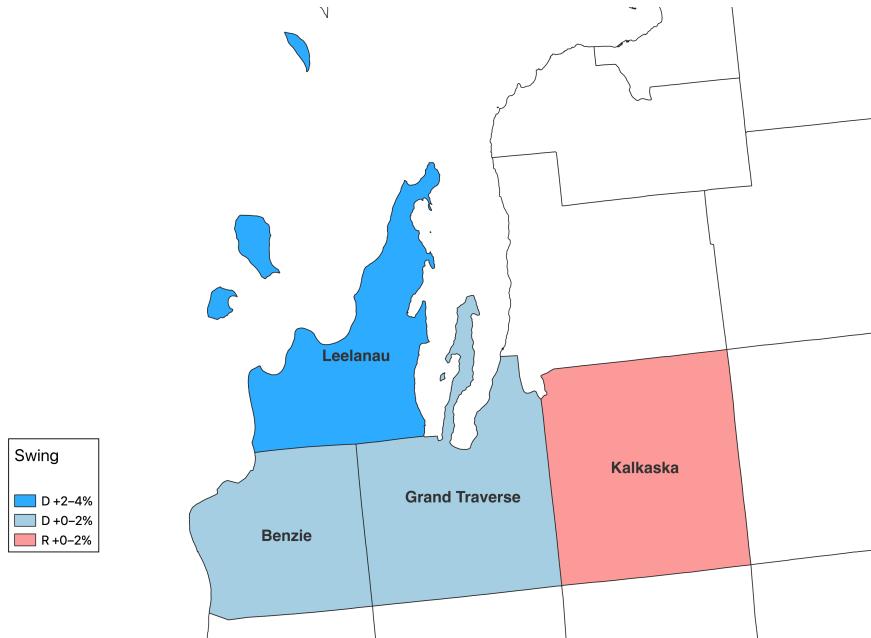


Figure 14: Northwestern Michigan Swing

Grand Traverse County, MI

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	30,502 (50.6%)	31,423 (50.1%)	+921 (-0.5%)
Democratic	28,683 (47.6%)	30,339 (48.3%)	+1,656 (+0.7%)

Total Swing: D +735 (+1.2%)

As with most areas where Harris improved from Biden, the swing in Northwestern Michigan is largely due to population movement. The area is an appealing place for retirees. But it's significant that this area, once a Republican stronghold where Democrats often didn't even bother to run in local elections, let alone win, is now even competitive. The largest county in the region, Grand Traverse County, has gone from having no Democrats on its board in 2016

to voting for Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer in her 2022 reelection bid. While the state Republican Party has done nothing but alienate moderate voters like those in Traverse City, local Democrats have carefully been developing a ground game over the past decade to achieve near parity with Republicans. They now have four of the nine seats on the county's board. Democrats statewide and nationwide would do well to learn from their example.

Chapter 13: Wisconsin: Democrats Abandoned Rural America

We come, at last, to the final swing state, the closest state in this election. In five of the last seven elections, Wisconsin has been decided by less than 1% of the vote. Its results are incredibly robust because of its consistently high turnout. It led the nation with 76.9% turnout this election, up from 75% in 2020. The media likes to group Wisconsin with Michigan and Pennsylvania as “Rust Belt” swing states, but Wisconsin’s economy and history is too dissimilar to warrant this classification. For having a primarily agricultural economy with some pockets of light industry like beer in Milwaukee, it’s more similar to Minnesota and Iowa than Michigan and Pennsylvania. The main difference among the three states is the urban distribution of their population. Minnesota is the most strongly Democratic of the three because the Twin Cities Metro Area makes up a larger share of the state’s population than, say, Milwaukee in Wisconsin or Des Moines in Iowa. Iowa is the most strongly Republican because it lacks a major metropolis. Wisconsin, however, is at a sweet spot where neither its cities nor its rural areas dominate the other, creating the most competitive state in the nation.

Wisconsin

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	1,610,184 (48.9%)	1,697,626 (49.6%)	+87,442 (+0.7%)
Democratic	1,630,866 (49.6%)	1,668,229 (48.7%)	+37,363 (-0.9%)

Total Swing: R +50,079 (+1.6%)

In 2020, Biden’s win in Wisconsin was fueled by massive gains in Dane County, home to the state capital Madison. Without his 35,138-vote gain there, he would have lost Wisconsin. When it is further considered that Wisconsin was the tipping-point state of the 2020 election, Dane County clearly becomes the most important county of the most important state. Long the base of the Progressive movement ever since the early 20th century in the La Follette era, it has been a Democratic bastion ever since Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. The county has

shown no love to Trump in any of his three elections, expanding its margins for the Democratic candidate in every succeeding election.

Dane County, WI

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	78,794 (22.8%)	85,454 (23.3%)	+6,660 (+0.5%)
Democratic	260,121 (75.5%)	273,995 (74.9%)	+13,874 (-0.6%)

Total Swing: D +7,214 (-1.1%)

Trump actually decreased his margin of defeat by percentage from 2020, but that's ultimately misleading as the margin by total votes grew by 7,214 votes. Remember, it's not percentages that candidates need to win; it's votes from actual voters. The 7,214-vote swing in favor of Harris was the second largest of any county this election, behind only Henry County, GA. Given Biden's precedent, the key for any Democratic victory in Wisconsin now is running up the margins in Dane County. The rest of the state is very Republican, and increasing turnout in the rest of the state will increase Republicans' margins even more. Unfortunately for Harris, her Dane County gains weren't enough.

If Dane County wasn't the key to Wisconsin this election, we might naturally look over to the Milwaukee area, the state's largest metropolitan region. Milwaukee County itself is a Democratic stronghold, containing the City of Milwaukee and its suburbs, while the exurban WOW counties (Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington) outside Milwaukee have historically been Republican strongholds. That being said, Trump lost considerable ground in suburbs and exurbs across the country in his first two campaigns. Waukesha County in particular has been moving to the left, even as it remains heavily Republican.

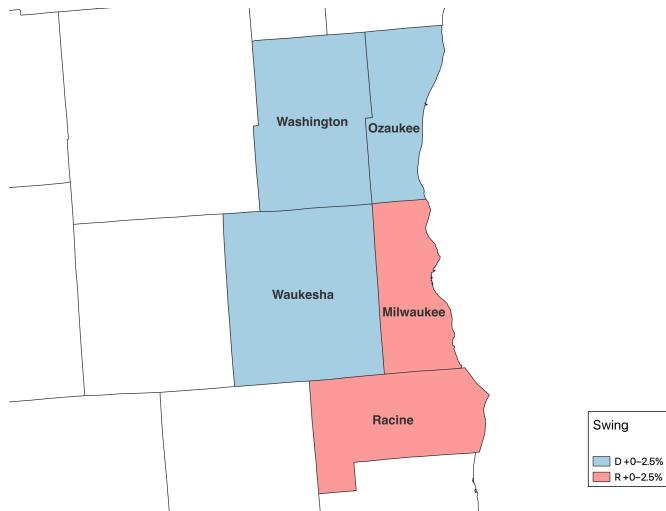


Figure 15: Milwaukee Area Swing

Milwaukee Area

County	Type	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Change
Milwaukee, WI	Urban	D +183,045	D +178,270	R +4,775
Ozaukee, WI	Exurban	R +7,395	R +6,630	D +765
Washington, WI	Exurban	R +33,587	R +33,100	D +487
Waukesha, WI	Exurban	R +55,743	R +54,290	D +1,453
Racine, WI	Satellite	R +4,320	R +6,626	R +2,306

Total Swing: R +4,376

Milwaukee County, WI

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	134,482 (29.3%)	138,022 (29.7%)	+3,540 (+0.4%)
Democratic	317,527 (69.1%)	316,292 (68.2%)	-1,235 (-0.9%)

Total Swing: R +4,775 (+1.3%)

Waukesha County, WI

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	159,649 (59.6%)	162,768 (59%)	+3,119 (-0.6%)
Democratic	103,906 (38.8%)	108,478 (39.3%)	+4,572 (+0.5%)

Total Swing: D +1,453 (+1.1%)

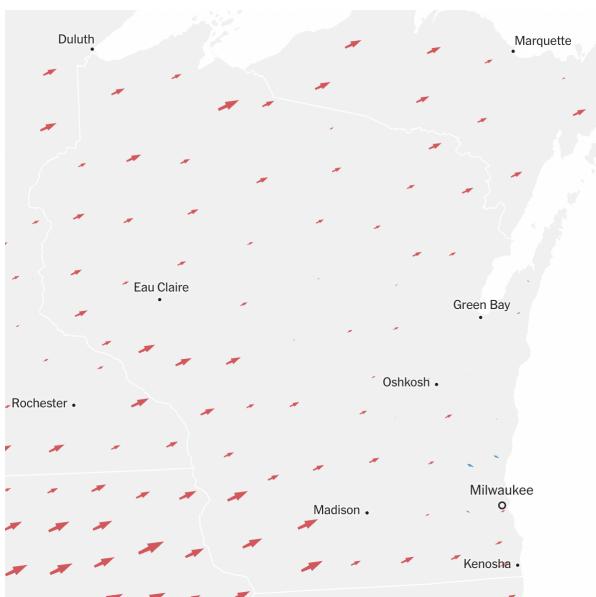
Major urban areas saw the largest shifts toward Trump in 2024. This was especially true for urban areas in non-competitive states like New York, Los Angeles, and Seattle. It was even true for the competitive urban areas Philadelphia and Detroit. But those urban areas had special distinctions, namely being a megacity and having a large Arab-American population, respectively, that make their pro-Trump shifts ungeneralizable as a larger trend to other competitive state urban areas. In places like Atlanta and Pittsburgh, Trump's gains were rather modest. The same is true for Milwaukee, where his total swing in the entire five-county region was only 4,376 votes, not nearly enough for him to have overcome his 2020 margin of defeat of 20,682 votes. This is because of record turnout in Milwaukee County, where Harris did not suffer the same drop-off from Biden that she did in non-competitive states. What movement there was toward Trump came primarily from new voters and from Biden 2020–Trump 2024 voters, not simply due to Democrats staying home. The increase in total votes cast is particularly impressive given that Milwaukee County has lost over 20,000 people since 2020.

If there's somewhere that Harris's decision to campaign with Liz Cheney may actually have been effective, it's Waukesha County and the Milwaukee exurbs. Waukesha County is a traditionally Republican county that's favored establishment Republicans over Trump. After Cheney appeared alongside Harris at an event in nearby Brookfield, the Republican-turned-independent mayor of Waukesha, Shawn Reilly, endorsed Harris.⁶⁶ Waukesha County's

⁶⁶ Jason Calvi, "Waukesha mayor endorses Kamala Harris; red city mayor plans to vote blue," Fox6 News

subsequent movement to the left reflects the movement of places where “democracy” was voters’ top issue.

So we’ve now looked at Wisconsin’s largest counties and seen very little movement, actually a modest movement toward Harris of 2,838 votes in the aforementioned counties. So what, then, explains how Trump flipped Wisconsin with a net flip of 50,079 votes? It’s obviously because he gained everywhere else, by an average of 802 votes in Wisconsin’s other sixty-six counties. But Wisconsin is a diverse state, and the shifts were not distributed uniformly. This can be illustrated by the *New York Times* vector field.



Northeast Wisconsin has the next largest concentration of Wisconsin’s population after the Milwaukee and Madison areas, with such cities as (going counterclockwise) Green Bay, Appleton, Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, Sheboygan, and Manitowoc. But the vector field shows there was hardly any movement in this area. Door County, in fact, shifted toward Harris and thus ended its bellwether streak of having voted for the winner in every election since 1992.

Milwaukee, October 23, 2024, <https://www.fox6now.com/news/waukesha-mayor-endorses-kamala-harris>.

The true key to Trump's victory in Wisconsin is the Driftless Area of southwest Wisconsin, so named because its landscape was uniquely unimpacted by glaciation during the Last Glacial Maximum. The Driftless Area forms a boundary of sorts between the industrial and agricultural Midwest. To the east lies the nation's former industrial core, best typified in Wisconsin by Milwaukee's beer industry and Kenosha's automobile industry. But the transition zone and areas to the west are dependent on agriculture and mining, best typified by neighboring Iowa right across the area. Iowa, of course, is the world's leading producer of corn. Politically, the Driftless Area, like Wisconsin as a whole, was blue from 1988 to 2012. Trump then flipped the area en masse in 2016 while retaining it in 2020. In 2024, this area shifted even further to the right. Granted, the total swing of the Driftless Area toward Trump is still smaller than his 2020 margin of defeat. But that's true for any region, any reasonable set of counties we can choose.

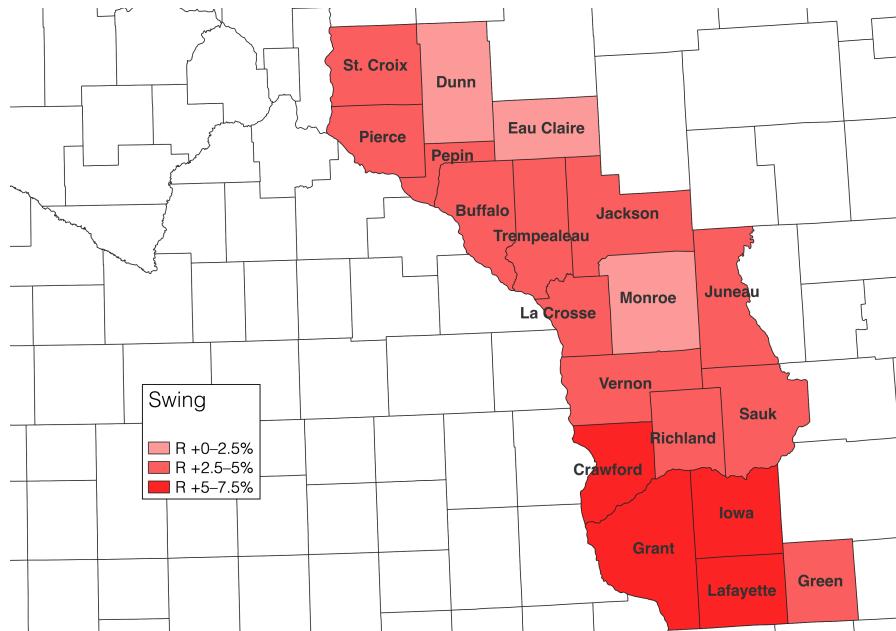


Figure 16: Driftless Area Swing

Driftless Area⁶⁷

County	Type	2020 Margin	2024 Margin	Change
La Crosse, WI	Small City	D +9,162	D +6,761	R +2,401
Grant, WI	Rural	R +3,144	R +4,956	R +1,812
Sauk, WI	Satellite	D +615	R +626	R +1,241
Pierce, WI	Exurban	R +3,019	R +4,246	R +1,227
Trempealeau, WI	Rural	R +2,548	R +3,442	R +894
Dunn, WI	Rural	R +3,276	R +4,083	R +807
Iowa, WI	Rural	D +1,919	D +1,119	R +800
Monroe, WI	Rural	R +5,342	R +6,087	R +745
Juneau, WI	Rural	R +4,003	R +4,671	R +668
Green, WI	Satellite	D +682	D +60	R +622
Lafayette, WI	Rural	R +1,174	R +1,787	R +613
Crawford, WI	Rural	R +667	R +1,253	R +586
Vernon, WI	Rural	R +761	R +1,293	R +532
Jackson, WI	Rural	R +1,535	R +2,047	R +512
Buffalo, WI	Rural	R +1,974	R +2,448	R +474
Richland, WI	Rural	R +876	R +1,222	R +346
Pepin, WI	Rural	R +1,095	R +1,275	R +180
Eau Claire, WI	Small City	D +6,279	D +6,672	D +393

Total Swing: R +14,067

We see that Trump won fourteen of the eighteen counties in the region. He's won thirteen of them in all three of his elections. The kicker, though, is that Barack Obama swept all eighteen counties in 2008 and only dropped two (Pierce and Monroe) in 2012.

⁶⁷ Dane County is geologically part of the Driftless Area too, but its economic and demographic character is so different that we exclude it from this table.



Lest you think that 2008 to 2024 represents too great a distance to draw meaningful comparisons, remember that we're only two candidates removed from 2008. Every election in this period has seen either Barack Obama or Donald Trump on the ballot. We can look at an individual county, here Grant County (Platteville) in the state's southwestern corner, to appreciate how drastic the swing is.

Grant County, WI, Shift from 2008 to 2024

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	9,068 (37.3%)	15,922 (58.3%)	+6,854 (+21%)
Democratic	14,875 (61.2%)	10,966 (40.2%)	-3,909 (-21%)

Total Swing: R +10,763 (+42%)

How did this happen? Grant County, along with much of the Driftless Area, voted for the Democratic nominee in six straight elections from 1992 to 2012 before voting thrice for Trump.

The roots of this region's shift to the Democratic Party after the Reagan landslides go back to the 1980s farm crisis, where tight lending practices by the Federal Reserve along with record production drastically reduced prices and land values. This led many family-owned farms to foreclose, with their land being swooped up by large corporate farms.⁶⁸ Voters blamed the Republican Reagan Administration, turning Wisconsin and Iowa blue in the 1988 election even as George H.W. Bush won a 426-electoral vote landslide. They remained blue for decades, until Donald Trump came along in 2016 campaigning for change, promising to roll back government land use and environmental regulations and pull out of free trade deals that differentially benefit globalist corporations. Obama ran on a similar message in 2008, explaining why he won Wisconsin and Iowa so decisively even as they've been perennially close (Wisconsin) or a red state (Iowa) in the surrounding elections. His failure to deliver for rural America certainly didn't help Democrats in the long run, but was the complete, 40-point swing of the Driftless Area inevitable?

I don't believe so. Bill Clinton ushered in the neoliberal, globalist era of the Democratic Party in full force, yet rural Iowans and Wisconsinites continued to vote for Democratic candidates. Those candidates, such as Obama, at least claimed to care about rural voters and their plight. On the other hand, Hillary Clinton in 2016 openly pursued a strategy of disregarding the rural vote in favor of flipping the suburban vote. Even in her election post-mortem, her campaign completely dismissed her record-low performance among rural voters as a reason for her loss, instead choosing to blame poor urban turnout driven by a sudden decline in enthusiasm caused by James Comey's letter.⁶⁹ As much as it was Trump's economic message that appealed to Driftless voters, so also was it Clinton and the Democratic Party's complete disregard, even disdain, for them that drove them firmly into the Republican coalition. These voters became Democrats in the 1990s after seeing the Republicans ignore them and sell them out to large corporations in the 1980s. Now it's the Democratic Party that has abandoned them, and the Republican presidential nominee in the last three elections has welcomed them

⁶⁸ "The Farm Crisis of the 1980s," Iowa PBS, <https://www.iowapbs.org/iowapathways/mypath/2422/farm-crisis-1980s>.

⁶⁹ Helena Bottemiller Evich, "Revenge of the Rural Voter," *Politico*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/hillary-clinton-rural-voters-trump-231266>.

into his fold.

The Upper Midwest is very much like an agricultural Rust Belt, encompassing not just Wisconsin and Iowa but slices of Southeast Minnesota and Northwestern Illinois; Northern Missouri shares some similarities as well. Like the industrial Rust Belt, this area is characterized by despair and the rapid thinning of the young population as jobs and wages have fled, many times overseas at the behest of large corporations. Whereas many major cities in the Rust Belt like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati have been able to diversify and modernize their economies for the 21st century, small and medium cities, like Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; Youngstown, Ohio; and Davenport, Iowa, don't have such an ability. They feel mainstream politicians of both parties have abandoned them, which draws them to the outsider candidate promising to shake up the system. These voters were decisive in bringing Trump into the presidency the first time. And they played a large role in bringing him back into the Oval Office.

"The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer. Everyone is listening to you now."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Donald Trump, "The Inaugural Address," transcript of speech delivered at the United States Capitol, Washington, DC, January 20, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>.

Part III: Post-Mortem for the Democratic Party

Chapter 14: What Went Wrong?

In Chapter 3, I observed the death of split-ticket voting in the Northeast, seemingly everywhere except the Northern New England states of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. While the death of split-ticket voting there hurt Republicans, it's actually Democrats who've been harmed more nationwide. This is particularly true in the rural Plains and agricultural Midwest. While these areas have always held strong social conservative views, they have not always followed the Republican Party. In fact, the original left-wing Populist movement (though it would probably be considered centrist by modern standards) emerged in the agricultural Midwest and South from the Granger movement, the Farmers' Alliance, and eventually the People's Party that was one of the most successful third parties in American history. The movement was driven by family farms resisting the power of large corporations like the railroads, with its original demands being the regulation of railroad rates and rural free mail delivery. As it grew into the nationwide People's Party, its demands came to include collective bargaining, a progressive income tax, a shorter work week, a postal savings system, and the direct election of Senators.

The People's Party achieved nationwide prominence in 1896, when young Nebraska populist William Jennings Bryan secured the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, running against the corporate control of both major parties.⁷¹ In a complete reversal perhaps paralleled only by Trump's repudiation of George W. Bush, Bryan's Democratic Party completely repudiated the incumbent Democratic administration of Grover Cleveland. While he didn't win the election, the demands of the Populist movement were fully brought into mainstream politics.

As the People's Party essentially merged with the Democratic Party after 1896 and Bryan himself abandoned the movement, the Populist movement mostly fizzled out in the early 20th century. But the social movement that followed, the Progressive movement, adopted many of its demands. On the surface, the Progressive movement could not have been more

⁷¹ Bryan's [Cross of Gold](#) speech

different: it was urban, the Populists rural; Progressives were supported by well-educated elites, Populists by small family farmers. Leading Progressives of both parties like Robert La Follette, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson were vocal opponents of Populism. But the two movements fundamentally shared the same distrust of large corporations and the corrupt political machines that controlled both parties. It was the Populists who brought these issues to the forefront, but it was the Progressives that enacted the basic reforms that we take for granted today: Rural Free Delivery by the Theodore Roosevelt Administration in 1906; the income tax with the Sixteenth Amendment in 1909; the direct election of Senators with the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913; and collective bargaining and the eight-hour work day in the New Deal of the 1930s.

I bring up all this history to show that rural America, now the embodiment of conservatism in the United States, has not always been this way. It was the original bastion of left-wing politics, even following from the early-19th-century tradition of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian Democracy. For most of American history, the Democratic Party embraced rural America. Even as the Democratic Party's focus shifted to urban issues during the Progressive Era, it continued to attract support from rural states in presidential elections throughout the New Deal Era. Even in the Sixth Party System when they became solid red states, Democrats were competitive with Republicans in down-ballot races as individual state Democratic Parties continued to address rural voters' issues. At times, this even translated to success on the presidential level, as we saw with Wisconsin and Iowa going blue during the 1988 election in a 40-state, 426-electoral vote Republican landslide. In addition to winning overwhelmingly in Wisconsin and Iowa, Obama in 2008 held Montana, South Dakota, and North Dakota within 10%, margins unimaginable in today's presidential politics.

But Democratic support in the rural Midwest was nowhere more important than the Senate. Because the low-population states throughout the area make up a tiny share of the nation's overall population, they have an outsized influence on the Senate. Democrats today like to complain that the Senate is unfairly biased against them because these states are predominantly Republican, but that has only been true for a decade. Anger against Republicans during the 1980s farm crisis resulted in the elections of prominent Democratic Senators Tom

Harkin of Iowa (1985–2015), Tom Daschle of South Dakota (1987–2005), and Kent Conrad of North Dakota (1987–2013). At one point in the 111th Congress (2009–2011), Democrats had a 60-seat supermajority in the Senate (when counting independent Senators caucusing with Democrats), thanks to overwhelming control of small-state Senate seats. Democrats controlled both Senate seats in Montana and North Dakota and one seat each in South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa. Most striking about this is that not only did Democrats win these Senate seats, they did so by landslide margins, even if these states voted for McCain in the presidential election. Displayed over the next several pages are results from the 2006 and 2008 Senate elections in Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, compared with the results in the same seats in the following Senate election cycle in 2012 and 2014. Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska are solid red states. Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois were all blue states during this period, but Democratic Senators won their elections in these states by far greater margins than Obama in his presidential runs.

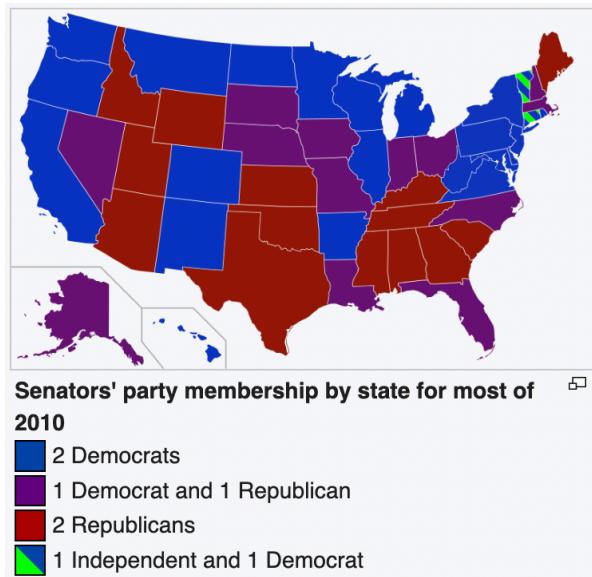
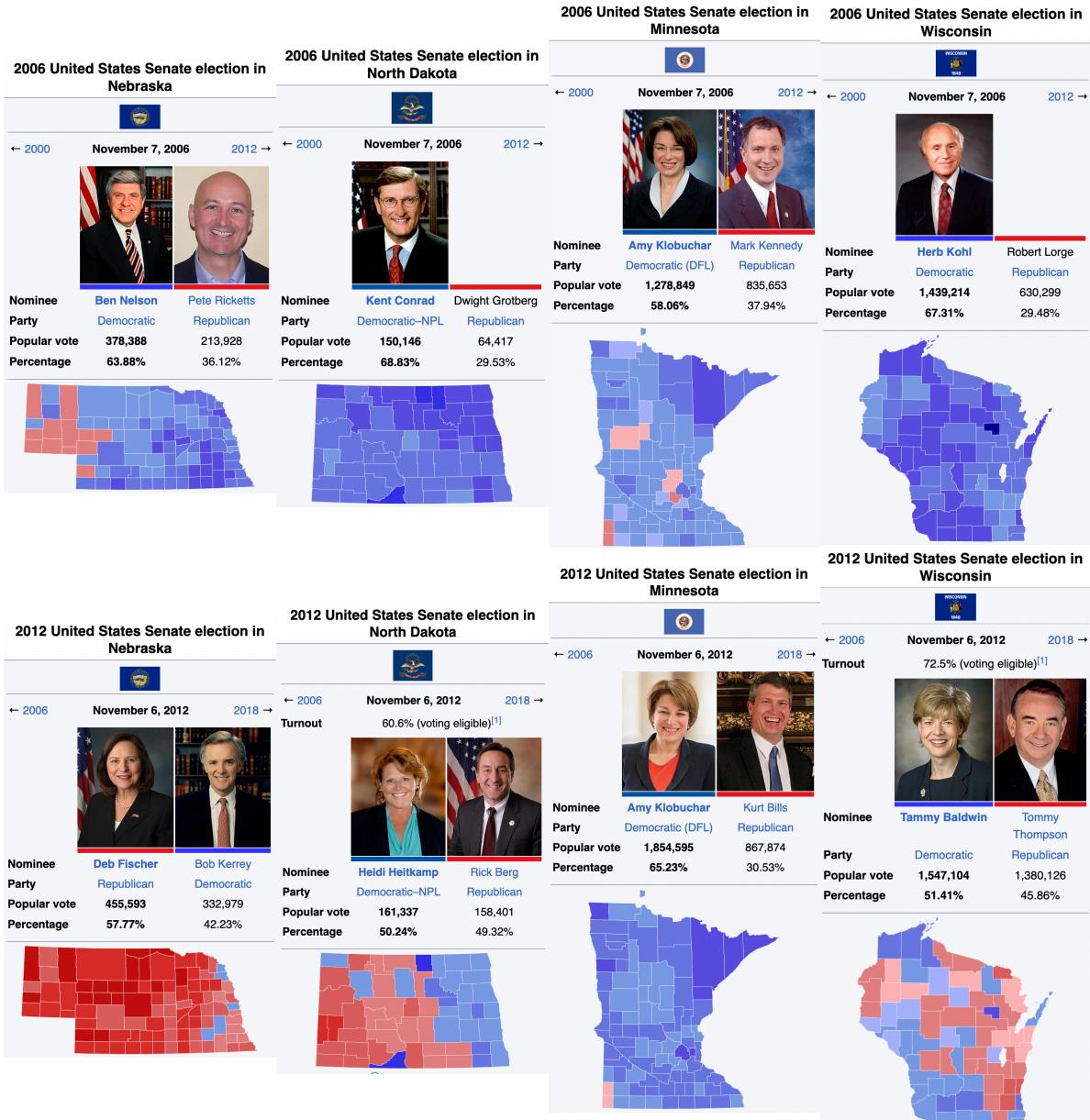


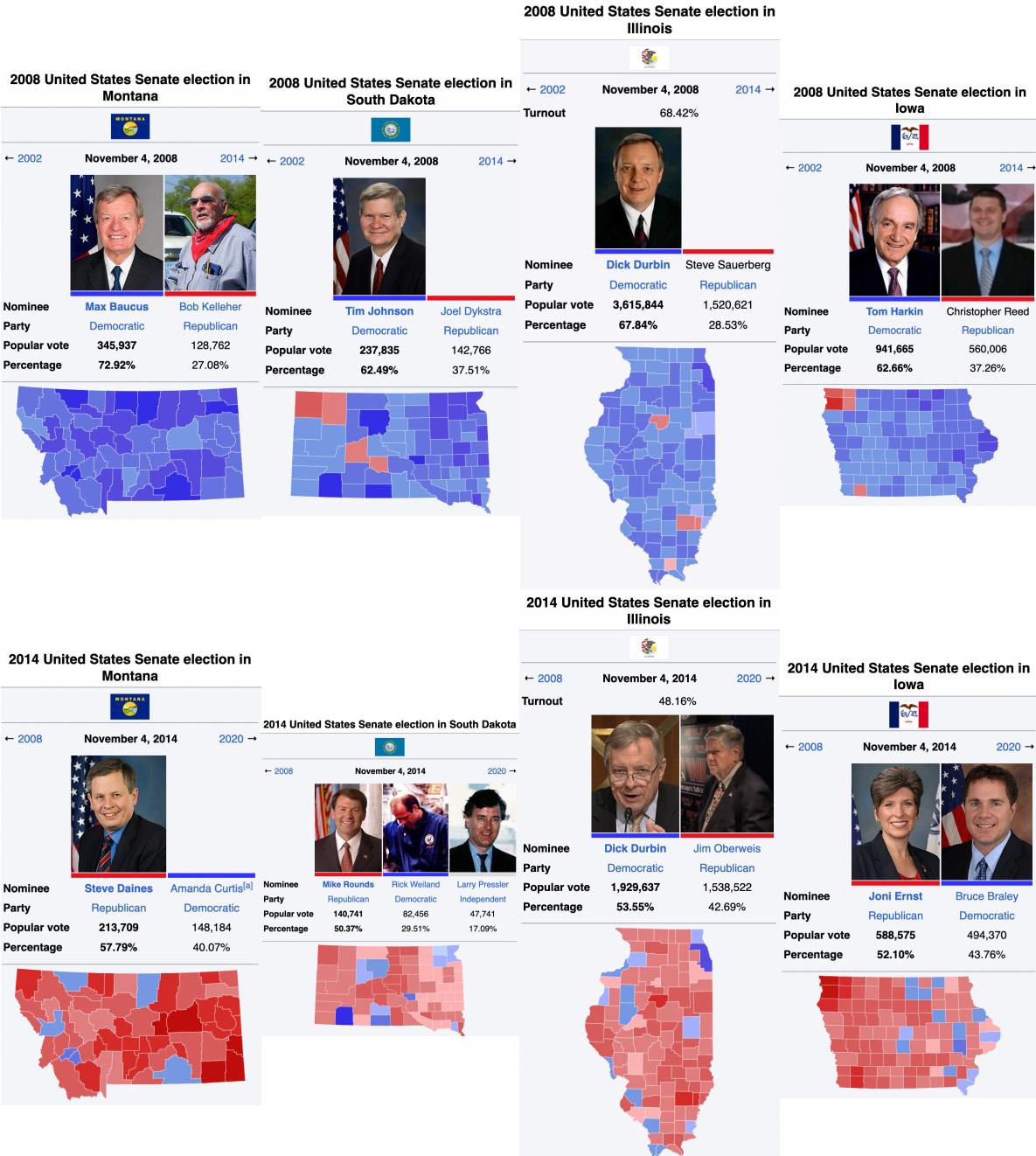
Figure 17: Senate in the 111th Congress

In 2006 and 2008, Democrats not only won all eight of these seats, but they were also winning them by sweeping nearly every county. All seven incumbents exceeded 60% of the vote, while the only non-incumbent, Amy Klobuchar, nevertheless won over 90% of Minnesota's counties. But just one cycle later, in 2012 and 2014, four of these seats were flipped by Republicans. Of the four retained by Democrats, one seat (Illinois) was in a solid blue state where Dick Durbin won entirely off the strength of the major urban area of Chicago; he lost almost every rural county in the state. One seat (North Dakota) was retained with a less than 1% margin, a far cry from Kent Conrad's sweep of the state's counties; Heidi Heitkamp would go on to lose by 11% in 2018. One seat (Wisconsin) also barely remained in the Democratic column, thanks to Tammy Baldwin's winning of the Driftless Area. That leaves only one state (Minnesota) where the Democratic candidate swept the state's rural areas, by even greater margins than she did in 2006.

What's behind this sudden transition? How does an entire region, the rural Midwest, go from almost entirely Democratic to almost entirely Republican over just one election cycle? We can't just attribute it to George W. Bush's unpopularity, because Obama, in half these cases running in the same election, didn't perform nearly as well. Is the issue just one of incumbency? That may very well be a factor. Only two of the eight Senators sought reelection, and one of them (Klobuchar) was the only one who expanded her margins. But the other incumbent, Durbin, had an even greater incumbency advantage, at the time having already served three terms over Klobuchar's one. Yet his 2014 performance was the worst in his career. This shows that incumbents were not entirely immune to the mass rightward swing. Indeed, it's possible that some incumbents decided not to run for reelection because they saw their diminished prospects of winning (Ben Nelson of Nebraska and Kent Conrad of North Dakota in particular).

Maybe the real question to ask is how Democratic Senate candidates ever won by such sweeping landslides in the 2006 and 2008 elections in the first place. These eight Democratic Senators—Ben Nelson, Kent Conrad, Amy Klobuchar, Herb Kohl, Max Baucus, Tim Johnson, Dick Durbin, and Tom Harkin—span the entire ideological spectrum of the Democratic Party. Nelson was the most conservative Democrat in the Senate, while Durbin and Harkin were two

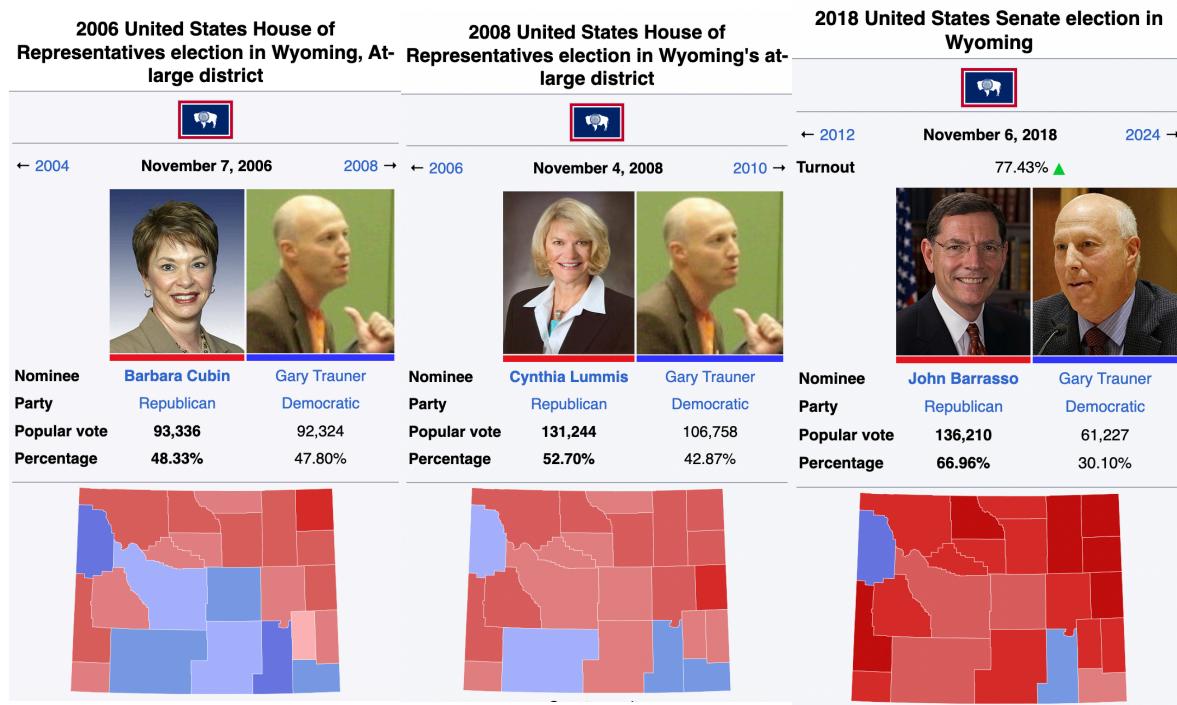




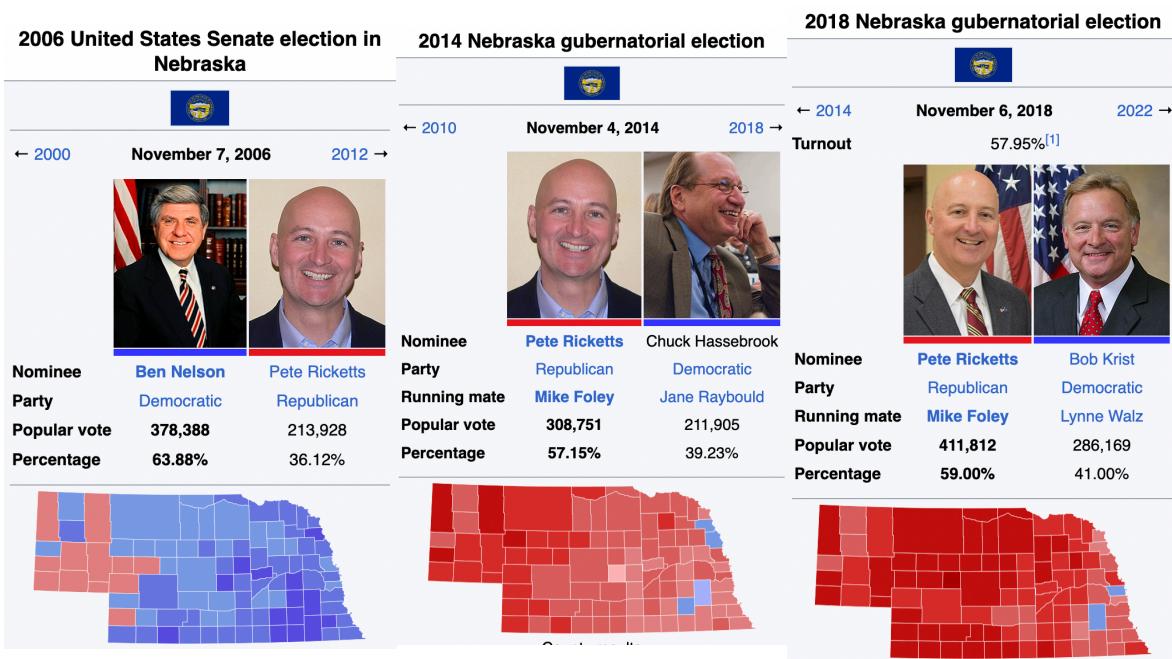
of the most liberal. All eight Senators were strong on agricultural issues, as they needed to be in order to win election. But so were the Democratic nominees that followed them in 2012 and 2014. Bob Kerrey, for instance, had previously held Nelson's Senate seat from 1989 to 2001.

If the real reason for the swing had anything to do with candidate quality, then we would expect popular candidates running in 2006 and 2008 to be similarly popular when they run again, and vice versa for unpopular candidates. The differing fates of Senators Klobuchar and Durbin in 2012 and 2014 give mixed results, so let's go down the ballot and look for other candidates.

Gary Trauner's Elections, 2006–2018



Pete Ricketts's Elections, 2006–2018



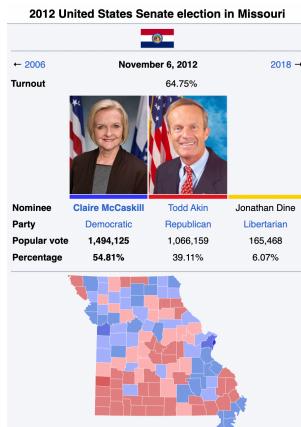
Displayed are results from two rural Midwestern candidates who ran for office both before the region's mass rightward shift and after it, one Democrat (Gary Trauner of Wyoming) and one Republican (Pete Ricketts of Nebraska). Neither candidate significantly changed their ideology over their elections. If individual candidate quality is what drove the shift, then we should still see these candidates performing similarly both before and after it. But this is not the result we have.

Despite being a Plains state somewhat similar to Montana and the Dakotas, Wyoming has not elected a Democratic Senator in the 21st century. That being said, the same trend of Democratic success on the state level still held in Wyoming, as it was led by a Democratic governor (Dave Freudenthal) from 2003 to 2011. In the election for Wyoming's at-large House district, Democrat Gary Trauner came incredibly close to unseating Republican incumbent Barbara Cubin in 2006, which was followed up by a respectable 10-point defeat in 2008 (by comparison, Obama lost Wyoming by 32% that year). But when Trauner ran for Senate in 2018, he lost in an absolute landslide. Granted, John Barrasso is an exceptionally strong

candidate who now has the highest approval rating of any Republican Senator in the nation, so there's an argument to be made that Trauner was doomed to be blown out in this manner in any universe. But I don't buy it, seeing how massively his overall vote totals dropped off from 2006 and 2008 to 2018.

Was Democratic success in 2006 and 2008 simply caused by poor candidate selection by Republicans? Pete Ricketts's electoral history in Nebraska suggests not. His landslide loss to Ben Nelson in the 2006 Senate election in Nebraska is essentially a mirror of his landslide victories in the 2014 and 2018 gubernatorial elections. The reason for Nelson's 2006 landslide victory isn't that Ricketts was a poor candidate. All this suggests to me that individual candidate quality had nothing to do with the region's rightward shift.

That being said, I do concede one Senate election in the rural Midwest that Republicans lost mainly due to poor candidate selection: the 2012 Senate election in Missouri, where Republican nominee Todd Akin made an infamous statement about "legitimate rape". Democratic incumbent and victor Claire McCaskill later wrote that she intentionally boosted Akin in the Republican primaries in order to face the weakest possible candidate in the general election.⁷²



⁷² Claire McCaskill, "How I Helped Todd Akin Win — So I Could Beat Him Later," in *Plenty Ladylike: A Memoir*, ed. Terry Ganey (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/08/todd-akin-missouri-claire-mccaskill-2012-121262/>.

I've ruled out Bush's unpopularity, the incumbency advantage, and individual candidate quality as major reasons for the shift. While each factor certainly played some role, they were not decisive. The true main cause of the shift has to do with events in the intervening years and the response to those events by the parties themselves.

The Great Recession of 2007–2009 was the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The impact of the Recession was felt hardest by the average worker or homeowner, who had their jobs lost and homes foreclosed. The Bush Administration's response, however, was not to provide relief to the Americans hurt by the crisis, but to bail out the Wall Street banks that caused the Recession in the first place. Barack Obama was elected President in an overwhelming victory amid the crisis, with voters entrusting him to rebuild the economy. Yet Obama, like Bush before him, refused to prosecute a single banker despite overwhelming evidence of criminal activity, essentially turning the financial system into the world's largest Ponzi scheme.⁷³ It was this sense that wealthy elites could get away with anything while the American people suffer at their behest that gave rise to the great social movements of the early 2010s.

The first and foremost was the Tea Party movement. Led by small-government conservatives, the movement specifically protested core Bush–Obama policies like the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), the 2009 stimulus, and the Homeowners Affordability and Stability Plan as government overreaches meant to protect wealthy urbanites from the consequences of their poor, even criminal, financial decisions. No matter your opinions on the merits of those policies, the Tea Party was absolutely right that recovery from the Recession differentially benefited wealthy urbanites. While America's major cities have long since recovered from the Recession, the same is not true for rural areas, which continue to suffer from falling employment, shuttering businesses, and population loss. These areas have also been hit hardest by the opioid epidemic, a product of the despair that's followed from the economic crisis.

The region most infamous for these trends, as they were already present before the Recession, is Appalachia, particularly the central Appalachian region containing southern and

⁷³ Matt Taibbi, "SECRETS AND LIES OF THE BAILOUT," *Rolling Stone*, January 4, 2013, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/secrets-and-lies-of-the-bailout-113270/>.

eastern Ohio, Eastern Kentucky, and West Virginia. JD Vance's memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* provides the best account of this. But what the Recession did was compound these trends in Appalachia, and bring them to rural areas across the country.⁷⁴ The Tea Party movement had its strongest support in newly developing cities hit hardest by the housing crisis and in rural areas, and its lowest support in major cities and among racial minorities.⁷⁵ Since the Republican Party embraced the Tea Party movement (or the movement was so effective in taking over the Republican Party; the effect is the same either way), there was a simultaneous surge in rural support for the Republican Party. The Democratic Party, best typified by Wall Street donors and the Washington politicians they fund like Obama, had become the party of the elites.

This is a separate, but related, trend to the shift of post-industrial areas toward Trump. The Tea Party movement predates Trump and had very little support in the Rust Belt. Its greatest gains were in rural America in the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections, benefiting the Republican Party generally, regardless of individual Republicans' position on the ideological spectrum. It likely even fueled Mitt Romney's increased margins of victory throughout the Plains and the South, despite Romney's history as a liberal, Eastern Establishment Republican. But the subsequent shift of the Rust Belt toward Trump has similar roots as the Tea Party: the feeling that the Democratic Party no longer represents them, as it caters only toward minorities and wealthy urbanites. The same thing happened in 2020 when Latinos began voting Republican en masse, and then in 2024 when Trump made unprecedented gains among working-class voters of all races.

The most famous and expensive television ad of the 2024 election was “[Kamala is for they/them, President Trump is for you](#)”. Democratic vice presidential nominee Tim Walz denounced the ad as a transphobic attack on common Americans. The mainstream media characterized it as an “anti-trans ad”. But they all misunderstand the strength of this ad. Few voters consider transgender rights to be an important issue, let alone cast their vote

⁷⁴ Alan Greenblatt, “Can Counties Fix Rural America’s Endless Recession?” Governing, July 28, 2016, <https://www.governing.com/archive/gov-rural-america-recession-oregon.html>.

⁷⁵ Dante Chinni, “Tea Party Mapped: How Big Is It and Where Is It Based?” PBS, April 21, 2010, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/tea-party-how-big-is-it-and-where-is-it-based>.

on that basis. The ad isn't effective because it demonizes transgender people. It's effective because it casts a stark contrast between the priorities of Harris and Trump. Much is made of the "Kamala is for they/them" line, but the real kicker is "President Trump is for you". Harris is made to be an out-of-touch politician more concerned about catering toward certain minority groups while ignoring the real issue she was supposed to be handling as a prosecutor, crime. On the other hand, Trump is presented as a candidate and president who cares for the American people. As the narrator reads "President Trump is for you", the headline "TRUMP TAX CUTS BENEFITED MIDDLE, WORKING-CLASS" is displayed atop scenes of typical Americans, young and old, black and white, male and female.

The Tea Party movement of the early 2010s successfully painted the Obama Administration and the Democratic Party as the party of out-of-touch urban elites caring only about their own economic interests and minority rights. This was successful in turning nearly every rural area in America Republican, but it was dreadfully unsuccessful in urban and suburban America. In theory, urbanites and suburbanites, especially minorities, should benefit from Democratic policies. These groups voted overwhelmingly for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joe Biden in 2020. But with the economic woes of the Biden Administration, working- and middle-class voters in urban and suburban areas felt that Democratic policies did not benefit them either. Like the early 2010s, we're coming out of a crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, that resulted in immense hardship for most Americans while the rich became richer.⁷⁶ Trump did what the Tea Party movement was never able to do: convince urban voters, including and especially minorities, that the Democratic Party is not for them.

This shift is particularly striking considering that the Democratic Party has made itself out to be the party of diversity and inclusion. Evidently, many racial minorities do not believe that the Democratic Party sincerely cares about the issues that impact them. The modern social progressive movement is based on policies like affirmative action, opposition to accelerated education programs for advanced students, and abstract critiques of "systemic racism": in one acronym, DEI. These are the favorite issues of corporate HR departments,

⁷⁶ Mark John, "Pandemic boosts super-rich share of global wealth," Reuters, December 6, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/pandemic-boosts-super-rich-share-global-wealth-2021-12-07/>.

which give themselves accolades for combating discrimination while not actually solving any of the inequities they purport to combat. This DEI-Industrial Complex⁷⁷ has enriched itself at the hands of the American taxpayer and well-meaning donor. A growing amount of the population is coming to see it as a colossal scam, resulting in drastically reduced funding for DEI programs since their peak in 2020–2021. The Democratic Party gives the impression, if not the outright endorsement (e.g. Joe Biden selecting “a black woman” as his vice presidential nominee, as opposed to the most qualified candidate), that it supports the DEI view of race. Minority voters themselves are increasingly disagreeing with this vision, if they ever believed it in the first place. The real issues that minority voters face are those that differentially impact minority neighborhoods and cities: crime and inflation. Yet these aren’t issues of “systemic racism” or “representation” or “diversity”. They impact Americans of all races; minorities just often bear the brunt due to their geographic distribution and, on average, lower incomes. The Republican Party’s view of race, where each individual is to be judged by their merit and their hard work and not their skin, is one that increasingly resonates with voters. They believe that outcomes will be better when instead of dividing Americans by their race as DEI promotes, we focus on elevating all Americans regardless of their race. The result is what JD Vance describes as a multicultural, multiracial, working-class party.

This now marks the second consecutive presidential election where the Democratic Party has gained support among college-educated voters, particularly white college-educated voters, but lost support among minorities. The Democratic Party needs a serious reckoning of how it treats race. What was the actual purpose of DEI? Was it actually to end racial or sexual injustice, or was it meant to appease the vocal activist, urban, socially progressive, and predominantly white and well-educated wing of the Democratic Party? The wing that Harris refused to appear on the *Joe Rogan Experience* out of fear of offending? This faction is commonly called “progressive”, recalling the Progressive movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But the views of many so-called “progressives” in the 21st century Democratic Party are hardly congruent with the aims of Progressivism as an ideology. Progressivism is

⁷⁷ Lily Zheng, “The Failure of the DEI-Industrial Complex,” *Harvard Business Review*, December 1, 2022, <https://hbr.org/2022/12/the-failure-of-the-dei-industrial-complex>.

an economic movement at its heart, one that opposes the unchecked power of monopolistic corporations and seeks to rectify the (primarily urban) issues they create. It is not a cultural movement, especially not one with militant positions on social issues above all else. But that's seemingly what modern progressives have become in the late 2010s and early 2020s.

The Tea Party movement wasn't the only major social movement that arose out of the Great Recession. While the Occupy movement was ostensibly the polar opposite of the Tea Party—one liberal, one conservative; one heavily concentrated in major cities, one based in small towns and rural America—they both stem from the same sense that common Americans are paying the price for the poor decisions made by a small wealthy elite: hence the slogan "We are the 99%". This was a grassroots movement that truly followed from the tradition of the Progressive movement, focusing on the core economic issues of unemployment, debt, homelessness, and especially income inequality. It was a reaction against not just the Republican Party, but also the ruling Democratic Party establishment. The Occupy movement reached its peak influence under the 2016 presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders, whose core message was his opposition to the power of Wall Street. Sanders's opponent was the heavily favored Hillary Clinton, the living embodiment of the Democratic Party's closeness to Wall Street, an ardent defender of the bailouts. As Clinton was supposed to be Obama's anointed successor, Sanders's campaign was completely written off, until he started winning.



We see that Sanders's support was strongest in the rural Midwestern states where Democrats had won overwhelming landslide down-ballot victories only the decade prior. This doesn't mean that Sanders would've won Montana and Kansas had he been the Democratic nominee instead of Clinton. What it does mean is that Sanders tapped into the same coalition that had previously sent Democrats to Washington, but which turned away from the Democratic Party after the Great Recession. This is also demonstrated by Sanders's strong support among independents during the primaries.⁷⁸ Just as Trump channeled the Tea Party's grievances with the American political and economic system to form his grassroots coalition, so also did Sanders channel the Occupy movement's grievances to form a grassroots coalition. The 2016 Sanders campaign was the greatest opportunity for the Democratic Party to tap into the working class's discontentment with the power structure in America. But in the end, it was not Sanders and the Democratic Party that created a multicultural, multiracial, working-class party. It was Trump.

Unlike the Tea Party movement, which was so powerful that it swept many establishment Republican incumbents out of office, the Occupy movement was generally unsuccessful. Sanders himself endorsed Clinton after losing the Democratic nomination, largely shutting down the grassroots coalition he had built. Enough Sanders voters in the primaries ended up voting for Trump in the general election to have impacted the outcome of the election.⁷⁹ In place of the economics-based, grassroots Occupy movement arose the culture war-focused modern progressive movement, that instead centered corporate-friendly movements like Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, and eventually DEI in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. This brought the Democratic Party to the place I explained earlier: a conception of identity out-of-touch with the American people, including and especially the very minorities they seek to defend. Sanders himself said it best in 2020:

⁷⁸ Dan Hopkins, "Why Sanders Does Better With Independents," *FiveThirtyEight*, April 18, 2016, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-sanders-does-better-with-independents/>.

⁷⁹ Daniella Kurtzleben, "Here's How Many Bernie Sanders Supporters Ultimately Voted For Trump," NPR, August 27, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/24/545812242/1-in-10-sanders-primary-voters-ended-up-supporting-trump-survey-finds>.

I think it is fair to say that in many ways the Democratic Party has become a party of the coastal elites, folks who have a lot of money, upper-middle-class people who are good people, who believe in social justice in many respects. But I think for many, many years the Democratic Party has not paid the kind of attention to working-class needs that they should've.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, “Sen. Bernie Sanders Calls Out the Democratic Party’s Neglect of the Working Class,” video, October 30, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TmJnP3VXqSc>.

Chapter 15: Whose Fault Is It?

Having answered what went wrong for the Democratic Party, the logical next question is to ask whose fault is it that Democratic support collapsed from complete, supermajority control of government in 2009–2011 to complete uncompetitiveness in rural America and the eventual rise and return of Donald Trump. Whose fault is it that the Republican Party is now the multicultural, multiracial, working-class party and the Democratic Party is the party of coastal elites? We might blame Barack Obama for selling out the diverse coalition that elected him to respond to the Great Recession, for continuing Bush’s policy of bailouts and shielding criminal bankers from prosecution. Or we might blame Hillary Clinton for being the living embodiment of Wall Street corruption. We might also blame Debbie Wasserman Schultz and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) for rigging the 2016 primaries against Bernie Sanders and his grassroots movement. Maybe Sanders himself is to blame for bending the knee to the Democratic establishment in 2016 and 2020. Certainly, all these figures and institutions share some blame. But the real culprit is someone less likely to be suspected, who hasn’t nearly received the attention he deserves. It’s Rahm Emanuel.

Before Bernie Sanders, the Democratic Party’s most effective grassroots organizer was fellow Vermonter Howard Dean. Dean began his 2004 presidential run as an outsider written off by the mainstream media, much like Sanders in 2016. But by exploiting opposition to the Iraq War, pushing for Progressive economic policies, and most significantly pioneering the use of the Internet for fundraising, his campaign vastly exceeded expectations, good for a third place finish in the primaries. Dean’s effective organization and grassroots appeal led him to be elected Chairman of the DNC in 2005, at a time when Republicans had complete control of the government. As DNC chair, Dean developed the fifty-state strategy for party organization, where the Democratic Party would fund every state party and attempt to field strong candidates in every district across the country, regardless of how competitive they were. This was in direct opposition to the conventional, swing-state strategy of fundraising where money is funneled via the national Democratic Party only to candidates in competitive races. Dean’s reasoning for supporting every state party was that coalitions are built from the local,

grassroots level that transcends state lines. Strong candidates are developed from the local level and molded into strong candidates at the state level. Furthermore, voter engagement in non-swing states, such as through advertising, is known to boost fundraising.⁸¹

While Dean's fifty-state strategy received broad support from rank-and-file Democrats, it was vehemently opposed by the Party's traditional leadership, those who already had positions of power before Dean's chairmanship. Bill Clinton's former advisor Paul Begala infamously described it as "just hiring a bunch of staff people to wander around Utah and Mississippi and pick their nose".⁸² But the two most notable opponents of the fifty-state strategy were then-Chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) Chuck Schumer and then-Chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) Rahm Emanuel. Emanuel in particular led the crusade against the fifty-state strategy, arguing it was a tremendous waste of resources when the Republican Party was focusing its funds on swing districts.

During Dean's chairmanship, the Democratic Party regained control of both chambers of Congress, even amassing a 60-seat Senate supermajority after the 2008 elections, as well as the presidency. Both Dean and Emanuel claimed credit for these victories, with former Clinton advisor James Carville lamenting that Democrats could have won more seats had Dean not "wasted" money in noncompetitive races. It was in the aftermath of Democrats' sweeping successes that the conflict between Dean and Emanuel reached its head. Having served in the Clinton Administration, Emanuel had pledged to endorse Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic primaries if she ran. When the primary came around, however, Emanuel strategically declined to endorse either Clinton or his fellow Illinoian, Barack Obama. Obama's campaign adopted a strategy much closer to Dean than to Emanuel, both in the primaries and in the general election. While Obama's decisive victory was inevitable given Bush's historic unpopularity, his wins in the Republican strongholds Indiana and North Carolina were the

⁸¹ Carly Urban and Sarah Niebler, "Dollars on the Sidewalk: Should U.S. Presidential Candidates Advertise in Uncontested States?" *American Journal of Political Science* 58, 2 (2014): 322-336, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24363488>.

⁸² *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, "Many Lawmakers Outraged At Phone Record Tracking; Bipartisan Senate Deal on Stalled Immigration Bill; Jane Harman Issues Statement On NSA Report; Howard Dean Under Fire From Fellow Democrats," CNN, Transcript, May 11, 2006, <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/sitroom/date/2006-05-11/segment/01>.

culmination of massively expanded funding of their state parties.⁸³ Like Dean, Obama built a grassroots movement based on the American people’s frustration with the economic system in wake of the Great Recession. One might naturally expect that Dean would play a prominent role in the Obama Administration. But it was Emanuel, the Clinton supporter who had refrained from endorsing Clinton in order to ingratiate himself with Obama, and not Dean whom Obama tapped as his chief of staff.

Never having gotten over his grudge against Dean from his DCCC days, Emanuel as chief of staff ostracized Dean from the White House, permanently shattering Dean’s influence over the Democratic Party. Almost certainly with Emanuel’s full support, Obama installed Virginia Governor Tim Kaine as Dean’s replacement as DNC chairman. While Kaine is a generally inoffensive figure popular in his home state of Virginia, he’s not known for being an elite fundraiser or an energetic politician. But Kaine’s banality may have been exactly what Emanuel wanted. Under Kaine’s chairmanship, the Democratic Party abandoned the fifty-state strategy for good, reverting to the traditional strategy of focusing exclusively on swing races. Nobody ever attributed this to Kaine. Everyone understood it was Emanuel’s doing.

Between working in the Clinton Administration and serving in Congress, Emanuel was employed by the investment banks Goldman Sachs and Wasserstein Peralta and served on the board of directors of Freddie Mac. Consequently, as Obama’s chief of staff, Emanuel was described as “the financial industry’s man inside the Obama White House”.⁸⁴ Indeed, Emanuel had been one of the leading proponents of the 2008 Wall Street bailouts, and he leveraged his unprecedented influence as chief of staff to shield Wall Street bankers from prosecution. This was in complete contradiction to Obama’s campaign promise to hold Wall Street accountable for its crimes, giving rise to the grassroots Tea Party movement explained in Chapter 14. Despite being elected as an outsider to shake up the system, Obama displayed tremendous

⁸³ Dan Gilgoff, “Vindication for Howard Dean and His 50-State Strategy,” *Roll Call*, November 5, 2008, <https://rollcall.com/2008/11/05/vindication-for-howard-dean-and-his-50-state-strategy/>.

⁸⁴ Timothy P. Carney, “Emanuel Will Be Wall Street’s Man in the Obama White House,” *Washington Examiner*, November 7, 2008, https://web.archive.org/web/20081210194209/http://www.dcemexaminer.com/opinion/columns/TimothyCarney/Emanuel_Will_be_Wall_Streets_Man_in_the_Obama_White_House.html.

continuity with the Bush Administration, both in policy and in staffing. Journalist Matt Taibbi documented this in great detail in a scathing December 2009 article accusing Obama of selling out his voters to Wall Street.⁸⁵

Rahm Emanuel, described as the most influential chief of staff in recent memory,⁸⁶ is the often forgotten figure behind the scenes most responsible for Obama's sellout. He was at his peak influence in 2010, having successfully turned the Obama Administration in Wall Street's favor and having removed his archenemy Dean from power, liberating the Democratic Party from the fifty-state strategy. If midterm elections are a referendum on the party in power, voters in the 2010 midterms soundly rejected everything Emanuel stood for. Nearly everything that Dean had built came crashing down in the 2010 midterms, with Republicans riding the Tea Party wave to flip a net of sixty-three seats to retake the House. The Senate was more robust to drastic swings for the time being, as only one-third of all seats were up for reelection, but Democrats still lost a net of six seats. But after a complete six-year Senate cycle with the 2014 elections, Republicans were also back in control of the Senate.

One might think the disastrous 2010 elections would be a warning to the Democratic Party to abandon the corporatist vision of the Democratic Party espoused by Emanuel and enacted under Kaine. One might hope for a recognition that Dean was right all along about the need to establish a grassroots movement, which the Republican Party had done so successfully with the Tea Party movement. One might expect the 2011 Occupy movement to be the greatest gift to the Democratic Party, giving it the chance to return to Dean's vision of a nationwide, economically Progressive party. But none of this happened. Anticipating major losses in the 2010 elections, Emanuel resigned as chief of staff to become the mayor of Chicago, entering himself into Chicago's storied tradition of corruption. Never having been invested in the DNC chairmanship in the first place (Emanuel was almost certainly the one actually calling the shots), Kaine stepped down in 2011 in order to run for the Senate.

⁸⁵ Matt Taibbi, "Obama's Big Sellout," *Rolling Stone*, December 9, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20100208010907/http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/31234647/obamas_big_sellout/print.

⁸⁶ Peter Baker and Jeff Zeleny, "Emanuel Wields Power Freely, and Faces the Risks," *The New York Times*, August 15, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/us/politics/16emanuel.html>.

The natural successor to Kaine would have been long-time Democratic strategist Donna Brazile, who served as the interim chair after Kaine's resignation. A range of other banal candidates was floated, such as former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland. But with the encouragement of unnamed advisors, Obama ultimately selected Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, best known for being the co-chair of Hillary Clinton's failed 2008 presidential campaign.⁸⁷ Like Emanuel, Wasserman Schultz was a long-time Clinton supporter and ardent corporatist who voted for the Wall Street bailouts, but who quickly endorsed Obama upon the conclusion of the primaries in order to ingratiate herself with the new administration. And like Emanuel, her true Clinton loyalties never faded. Under Wasserman Schultz, the DNC ignored Dean's continuing warnings and rejected the fifty-state strategy, resulting in another disastrous round of midterm elections in 2014. But the most infamous events of Wasserman Schultz's tenure as DNC chair came during the 2016 presidential primaries.

As shown in the previous chapter, Bernie Sanders came from the tradition of the grassroots Occupy movement, presenting himself as the antithesis to Clinton's corporatism from the left. As Sanders showed an uncanny ability to forge a winning coalition, paralleled in recent history only by Obama and Trump, the Wasserman Schultz DNC's response was not to embrace the movement by letting primary voters choose their nominee without interference, but to rig the primaries in Clinton's favor. Documents leaked to and published by WikiLeaks showed that while top DNC officials, including Wasserman Schultz herself, claimed to be facilitating a fair primary, they were actively colluding with the Clinton campaign behind the scenes to sabotage Sanders. Outcry from the Democratic base forced Wasserman Schultz's sudden resignation, and her interim successor Donna Brazile would later uncover further proof that the primary was rigged from the beginning: a Joint Fund-Raising Agreement between the DNC and the Clinton campaign signed in August 2015, giving the Clinton campaign complete control over party finances.⁸⁸ As egregious a violation as this was against the Sanders cam-

⁸⁷ Jeff Zeleny, "Wasserman Schultz Picked as D.N.C. Chairwoman," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2011, <https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/05/debbie-wasserman-schultz-picked-as-chairwoman-of-d-n-c/>.

⁸⁸ Donna Brazile, "Inside Hillary Clinton's Secret Takeover of the DNC," in *Hacks: The Inside Story of the Break-ins and Breakdowns that Put Donald Trump in the White House* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2015), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/11/02/clinton-brazile-hacks-2016-215774/>.

paign, it was as detrimental to down-ballot Democrats. In theory, this fundraising agreement should have split funds between the Clinton campaign and state parties. But emails published by WikiLeaks showed that the Clinton campaign laundered over 99% of funds for itself, leaving less than \$800,000 for state parties.⁸⁹ Thus not only did Wasserman Schultz's DNC abandon Dean's fifty-state strategy, but it completely inverted it where state parties were being used to funnel money into the national party.

This is where things become speculative, conspiratorial even. Clinton's choice as her vice presidential nominee was none other than Tim Kaine, the DNC chair who was replaced by Wasserman Schultz, who in turn rigged the Democratic primaries for Clinton. The theory goes that Kaine's resignation as DNC chair was engineered by the Clinton team in order to install Wasserman Schultz. In turn, so says the theory, Kaine would be rewarded with the vice presidency.⁹⁰ While there's no proof of a grand collusion dating back to 2011, the hacked emails of Clinton Campaign Chairman John Podesta, eventually leaked to WikiLeaks, suggest that Kaine had been selected as vice president from the outset of Clinton's 2016 campaign.⁹¹

Regardless of how complex the conspiracy was, one thing is clear: that ever since the beginning of Obama's presidency, the Democratic Party was being molded into the party of Hillary Clinton with her team being installed in every position of power. This is best typified by Wasserman Schultz's appointment as DNC chair and the DNC's subsequent rejection of the grassroots Occupy movement and Sanders campaign. But it goes back beyond Wasserman Schultz and even Clinton herself. It goes back to Rahm Emanuel, whose vision of electoral politics focused on the narrow goal of winning swing states and swing districts as opposed to forming diverse coalitions. It was Rahm Emanuel who first represented the corporatism of Hillary Clinton in the Obama Administration. It was Rahm Emanuel who made sure Obama sold out the American people to Wall Street, triggering the grassroots Tea Party movement for

⁸⁹ Kenneth P. Vogel and Isaac Arnsdorf, "DNC sought to hide details of Clinton funding deal," *Politico*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/dnc-leak-clinton-team-deflected-state-cash-concerns-226191>.

⁹⁰ Kim LaCapria, "Tim Kaine Made DNC Vice Presidential Deal with Hillary Clinton in 2011," *Snopes.com*, July 29, 2016, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/tim-kaine-dnc-deal/>.

⁹¹ Erick Mullen, *Bob Glennon*, July 15, 2015, published by WikiLeaks, October 7, 2016, <https://wikileaks.org/podesta-emails/emailid/2986>.

Republicans. I don't claim that Rahm Emanuel is also directly responsible for the rejection of the Occupy movement or the rigging of the 2016 primaries against Sanders. But those decisions follow directly from Emanuel's vision of politics that ignores the importance of coalitions and exists to serve those in power. Democratic Party elites wrongly thought they could anoint their nominees and cruise to victory off their mighty Wall Street-backed war chest.

That's what happened again in 2024, first when the DNC promised that Joe Biden would be the Democratic nominee even though other candidates were challenging him, and then when Biden was summarily removed and replaced by Kamala Harris without any semblance of input from voters. It wasn't as if there weren't any popular, effective candidates who could have run against Biden. In fact, even while he was still running as a Democrat, Robert Kennedy Jr. built a bipartisan grassroots coalition opposing both the Republican and the Democratic establishments, much like Sanders and Trump before him. His central campaign message lambasting rich elites' weaponization of the COVID-19 pandemic to wipe out the middle class recalls the Tea Party and Occupy movements.⁹² Like the Great Recession, COVID-19 was a crisis that revealed the broken nature of America's economic system that's rigged to reward the super-rich no matter what. Like the Great Recession, it resulted in a massive transfer of wealth toward the upper classes. Like the Great Recession, those responsible for the disastrous economic and social policies in response to the pandemic, if not for creating the virus itself, have never been punished, instead being hailed as heroes.⁹³ Running as a Democrat, Kennedy positioned himself as the only candidate who could take on Trump for his COVID policy, for selling out the American people as Obama had. But instead of allowing Kennedy a chance to seek the Democratic Party's nomination, let alone embrace his grassroots coalition, party leadership actively pushed him out of the party entirely, into the welcoming arms of Donald Trump. It's doubtful that Kennedy's endorsement changed the outcome of the election, but the more significant result of the Democrats' rejection of Kennedy is the alienation of a significant piece of the electorate who might otherwise have voted Democratic. But I doubt Democratic

⁹² Candy Woodall, "Robert F. Kennedy Jr. says middle class was 'wiped out' during COVID-19 lockdowns," *USA Today*, April 23, 2023, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2023/04/23/robert-f-kennedy-jr-covid-biden-trump-2024/11724150002/>.

⁹³ Such as Anthony Fauci winning [Columbia's Frank A. Calderone Prize in Public Health](#)

leadership cares at all, because they see Kennedy as a threat to their corporatist agenda.

Howard Dean was right to pursue a fifty-state strategy. Barack Obama took this principle and forged a winning grassroots coalition. Obama's decision to empower Emanuel instead of Dean was the most detrimental decision for the Democratic Party this century. Under the Emanuel–Clinton cabal that included Tim Kaine and Debbie Wasserman Schultz, the Democratic Party became the party of wealthy, urban elites that looked down upon grassroots organizing and coalition-building. With the Electoral College and the structure of the Senate, coalitions are necessary for parties to gain and maintain political power. That's why I began this analysis with a discussion of coalitions. The ruling class of the Democratic Party didn't seem to understand this. But Donald Trump did, and that's the real reason why he won the 2024 election.

Chapter 16: Democrats Outperforming Harris

While the Great Recession and the Tea Party movement dealt a major blow to split-ticket voting across the country, especially in the agricultural Midwest, the Trump era has truly polarized the country to nearly eliminate it entirely. This was especially true in the 2018, 2020, and 2022 elections, where most red-state/district Democrats were defeated or retired, such as Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota, Representative Collin Peterson of Minnesota, and Representative Ron Kind of Wisconsin. Of the eight Senate seats in the agricultural Midwest that Democrats won by landslide margins in 2006 and 2008, only one of those seats remained a Democratic landslide in 2012 and 2018: that of Amy Klobuchar. While he never won any landslides, for all practical purposes we can add Senator Jon Tester of Montana to this group just for being able to win at all as a Democrat in deep-red Montana.

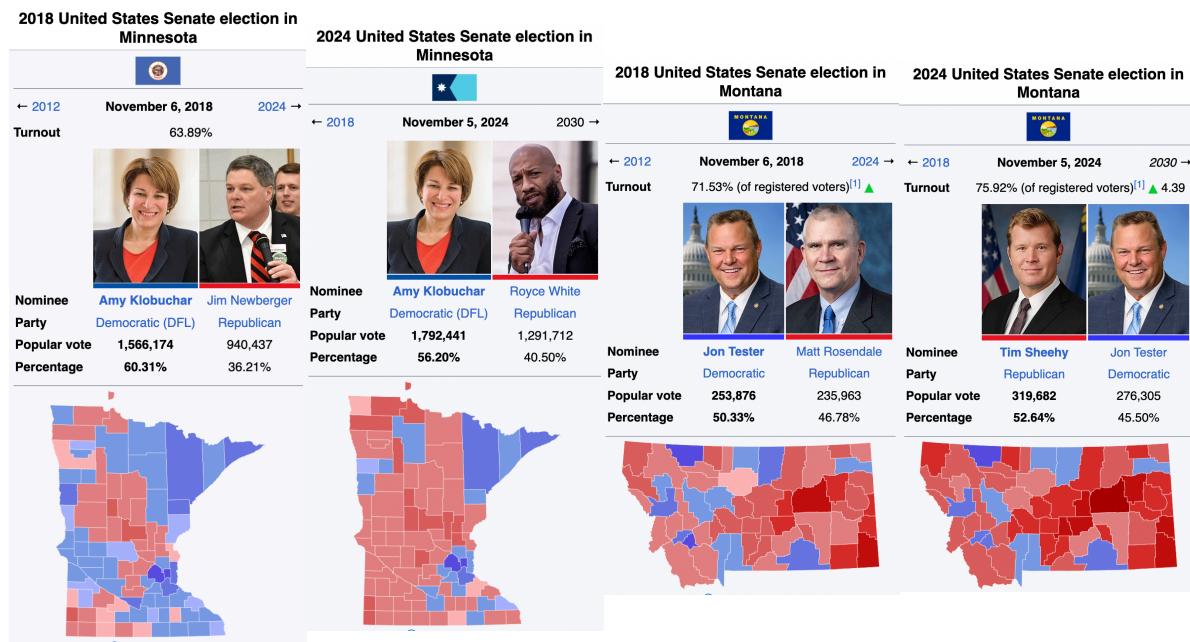
I'm making it a point to exclude Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia from this group. While he was a registered Democrat until 2024 and caucused with Democrats for his entire Senate tenure, he opposed the Democratic Party so often and so publicly that he might as well be considered a true independent. While Tester was one of the more conservative Democrats in the Senate, he's been an ardent defender of the Democratic Party's policy positions, differing mainly on core rural issues like gun rights and lowering the estate tax for farms.

The reason why Tester and Klobuchar remained so popular in rural Montana and Minnesota is their grassroots connection to their voters. Tester simultaneously maintained his career as a family farmer while serving in the Senate. Along with this apparent authenticity, Tester's strong support for veterans has won him support even from Republicans. Similarly, Klobuchar has tapped heavily on her family's roots in Minnesota's Iron Range, making her particularly popular in the mining industry that has shifted massively to the right in the 21st century. She also ran Minnesota's equivalent of the fifty-state strategy, an "eighty-seven-county strategy", if you will, campaigning and getting to know voters in every corner of the state.⁹⁴ While running in the same elections as popular figures like Barack Obama and Tim

⁹⁴ Dave Orrick, "Who is Amy Klobuchar, what's her story — and why is she so popular in Minnesota?" *Pioneer Press*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.twincities.com/2019/02/08/who-is-sen-amy-klobuchar-democrat-minnesota-expected-to-announce-running-for-president-2020/>.

Walz, Klobuchar was consistently the best performing Democrat in Minnesota.

2018 and 2024 Senate Elections in Minnesota and Montana



Having won rural voters both before and after the major partisan realignment of rural America in the early 2010s, Tester and Klobuchar both clearly maintained the grassroots connections that once typified the Democratic Party. After the 2018 elections, it may have been appealing to see Klobuchar as the future of the party. She ran for president in 2020 and emerged as one of six remaining contenders after the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary, but her campaign floundered thereafter as her fundraising ran dry. Throughout her campaign, she was dependent on Minnesota donors, who are useful and necessary for winning elections in Minnesota, but not so much the rest of the country. Lacking the name recognition or political clout anywhere outside of Minnesota, her grassroots messaging did not translate to national success.

Further showing that Klobuchar and Tester are not the future of the Democratic Party are their results in their 2024 reelection campaigns. Klobuchar and Tester outperformed Kamala Harris the most out of any Democratic Senate candidates, but both Senators also

underperformed their previous election results, Klobuchar especially. Klobuchar lost nearly all of rural Minnesota as her support dropped to a personal worst of 56.3%. Her raw vote total of 1.792 million was even below her 2012 raw vote total of 1.855 million, despite Minnesota having a significant population gain in the intervening 12 years.

Minnesota President vs. Senate Comparison

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	1,519,032 (46.7%)	1,219,712 (40.5%)	-227,320 (-6.2%)
Democratic	1,656,979 (50.9%)	1,792,441 (56.3%)	+135,462 (+5.4%)

Total Difference: Klobuchar +362,782 (+11.6%)

Minnesota Senate Election Shift from 2012 to 2024

Party	2020 Votes (%)	2024 Votes (%)	Change
Republican	867,874 (30.5%)	1,291,712 (40.5%)	+423,838 (+10%)
Democratic	1,854,595 (65.2%)	1,792,441 (56.3%)	-62,154 (-8.9%)

Total Swing: R +485,992 (+18.9%)

Tester, meanwhile, lost his 2024 reelection bid to Republican Tim Sheehy. With nearly certain Republican pick-ups in West Virginia and Ohio and no reasonable chance of a Democratic pick-up anywhere, it was already a foregone conclusion before the election that Republicans would flip back control of the Senate, so this race was very unlikely to determine the balance of power. But it deals a final death blow to the Democratic Party's fortunes in the agricultural Midwest. Tester was the last Democrat in either chamber to hold a rural Plains seat. His loss isn't because he changed his ideology; he's been remarkably consistent throughout his political career. It's a product of the nationalization of politics, that an incumbent so

much more popular than a generic Democrat can't win reelection.

Montana President vs. Senate Comparison

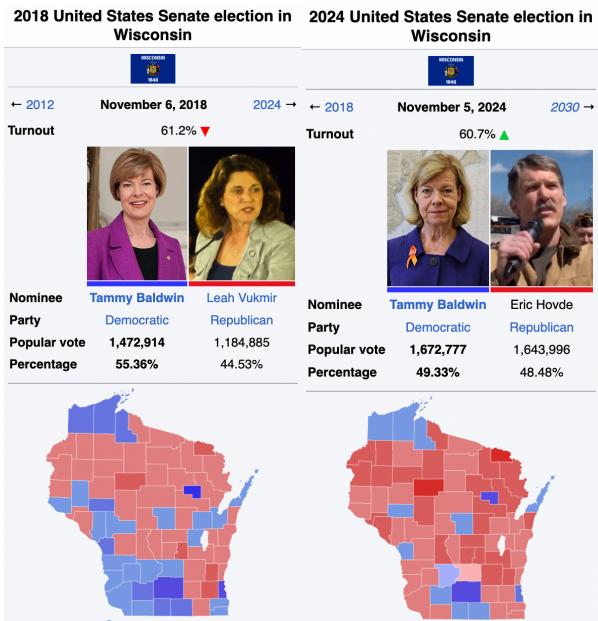
Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	352,079 (58.4%)	319,682 (52.6%)	-32,397 (-5.8%)
Democratic	231,906 (38.4%)	276,305 (45.5%)	+44,399 (+7.1%)

Total Difference: Tester +76,796 (+12.9%)

While we're on the subject of Montana, here's a quick shout-out to Blaine County, which is now the presidential bellwether county with the longest streak of voting for the winner, having done so in every election since 1988, when it went for Dukakis amid the 1980s farm crisis. Other than 1988, it has voted for the winner in every election dating back to 1916, with a vote for Theodore Roosevelt in 1912 being the only other blemish on its record.

Although her victories were not landslides, Senator Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin also remained competitive in rural areas through 2018. Baldwin, unlike more moderate Democrats like Klobuchar and Tester, comes from the Progressive tradition of Midwestern populists like Tom Harkin and her predecessor Herb Kohl. After her 11-point victory in 2018, she was touted as a strong Democrat that the party should follow. But even though she won reelection in 2024 despite Trump carrying Wisconsin, she only did so by a razor-thin margin of 29,000 votes and less than 1%, barely outperforming Kamala Harris. Baldwin herself hasn't changed her ideology since first being elected in 2012. Her dramatic drop in support shows that even the Democratic Party's original populist message in the agricultural Midwest is no longer effective in light of the nationalization of politics.

2018 and 2024 Senate Elections in Wisconsin



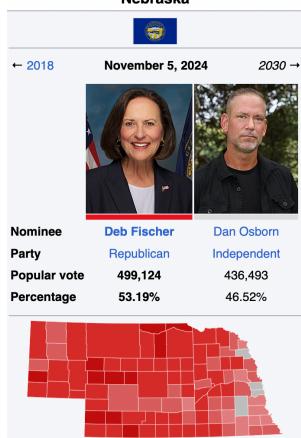
Wisconsin President vs. Senate Comparison

Party	President	Senate	Difference
Republican	1,697,626 (49.6%)	1,643,996 (48.5%)	-53,630 (-1.1%)
Democratic	1,668,229 (48.7%)	1,672,777 (49.4%)	+4,548 (+0.7%)

Total Difference: Baldwin +58,178 (+1.8%)

Klobuchar and Tester represented the last of a long tradition of Democrats winning in the rural Midwest. They fell fighting, outperforming Harris more than any other Democratic Senate candidates. But there was another Senate candidate, running against an incumbent Republican, who outperformed Harris even more than Klobuchar and Tester. Earlier, I said that Democrats had no realistic opportunities to pick up any Senate seats. I could say that, but I couldn't say that every Republican-held seat was safe to be retained. That's because of independent Senate candidate Dan Osborn in Nebraska.

2024 United States Senate election in Nebraska



Nebraska President vs. Senate Comparison

Candidate	President	Senate	Difference
Trump/Fischer	564,816 (59.3%)	499,124 (53.3%)	-65,692 (-6%)
Harris/Osborn	369,995 (38.9%)	436,493 (46.7%)	+66,498 (+7.8%)

Total Difference: Osborn +132,190 (+13.8%)

A former veteran, Osborn first rose to prominence when he led the 2021 Kellogg's strike from Omaha. A lifelong independent, he then challenged incumbent Republican Senator Deb Fischer in 2024 when no Democrat ran. Osborn rejected both the Republican and the Democratic Parties, endorsing neither Trump nor Harris in the presidential race and pledging not to caucus with either party if elected.⁹⁵ His campaign was specifically targeted at middle- and working-class voters dissatisfied with out-of-touch, elite Washington insiders like Fischer. Describing his ideology as “paycheck populism”, Osborn synthesized the popular economic policies held by both parties, such as support for unions, increased funding of public education, FTC Chair Lina Khan’s antitrust agenda, small business and middle class tax cuts, and

⁹⁵ Contrast this with, say, Senator Angus King who caucuses with Democrats even after winning elections as a true independent.

increased border security and immigration reform.⁹⁶

While Nebraska has a rich history of grassroots populism, having hosted the first convention of the People's Party in 1892 and produced Progressive firebrands of both parties in William Jennings Bryan and George Norris, it's increasingly become a polarized, Republican-controlled state in the 21st century. Fischer ultimately was able to win by painting Osborn as a Democrat [masquerading as an independent](#). That being said, Osborn's 46.7% share of the vote was one of the strongest true independent Senate campaigns ever, outperforming any Democrat in comparison to Kamala Harris.

Nebraska Election Results by Congressional District

Office	CD-1	CD-2	CD-3	Total
President	R +13%	D +4.6%	R +53.6%	R +20.4%
Senate (Regular)	I +1.2%	I +12.6%	R +34.1%	R +6.6%
Senate (Special)	R +18%	R +0.4%	R +58%	R +25.2%
House	R +20.2%	R +1.8%	R +60.8%	N/A

From the above table, we can rank Republicans by their popularity in Nebraska. The rankings are the same in each district and statewide. From most to least popular, it went: generic House candidates (incumbents Mike Flood, Don Bacon, and Adrian Smith), Pete Ricketts (running in the concurrent special election to complete the term originally won by Ben Sasse in 2020), Donald Trump, Deb Fischer. Nebraska is not a state where Trump's boosted the Republican Party. This shows in his slight underperformance of Ricketts and his major underperformance of Republican House candidates. But to me, the most striking result on this table is that Dan Osborn won Nebraska's 1st Congressional District. This district hasn't voted for any Democratic candidate in any election since Ben Nelson in 2006. It's

⁹⁶ Justin H. Vassallo, "The Next Prairie Populist?" *Commonweal*, October 15, 2024, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/next-prairie-populist>.

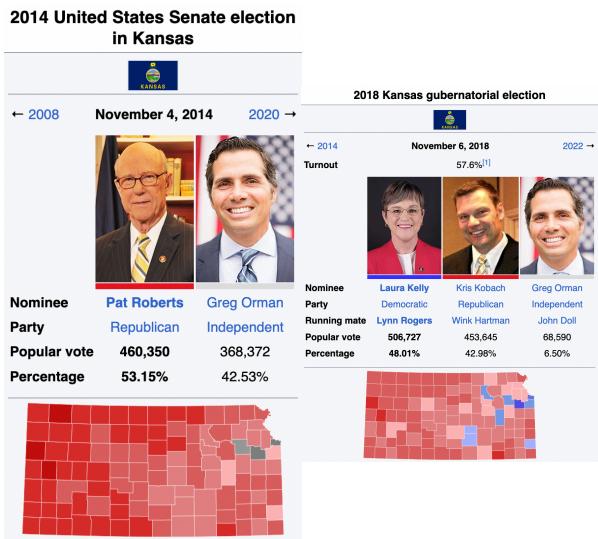
always a foregone conclusion that it votes Republican, until Osborn. That shows just how impressive Osborn's performance was, even though he didn't win.

On this table, you'll also see that incumbent Republican Don Bacon won reelection in Nebraska's 2nd Congressional District. Pundits had predicted him to lose, as the district has shifted left during the Trump era. But Bacon won in the most critical Republican hold that enabled them to keep control of the House. He did so by separating himself enough from Trump to the point where Democratic-leaning voters see him as sufficiently moderate, while not going so far as to lose a primary election to a diehard Trumpist. He's endorsed Trump in all three of his presidential campaigns, but also strongly criticized him on matters like overturning the 2020 election. Or perhaps the real story here is that Trump is just so much more unpopular in this district than a generic Republican like Bacon or Ricketts. Its central city of Omaha is a historically Republican city with wealthy, conservative suburbs. As seen in places like Colorado Springs and Waukesha, those demographics have been less favorable to Trump.

Chapter 17: Independent and Third-Party Movements

Some might point to Osborn's defeat as a sign that split-ticket voting is dead and further confirmation that independent and third-party candidates truly have no chance in the current political system. They do have a point about third-party candidates' failures—since 2010, Angus King is the only candidate to win a Senate election without the support of either major party. Between then and Osborn, there has only been one other remotely competitive Senate race featuring a major candidate not endorsed by a major party.⁹⁷

Greg Orman's Elections, 2014 and 2018



That was the 2014 Senate election in Kansas, where independent Greg Orman challenged incumbent Republican Pat Roberts. Like its Plains neighbors, Kansas was a deep-red state with a tradition of split-ticket voting on the state level, but it never actually elected a Democratic Senator. That's because Roberts held onto his seat by large margins in 2002 and 2008, probably because he was one of the more powerful Republicans in the Senate, having chaired the Ethics Committee and the Intelligence Committee; he would go on to chair the Agriculture Committee after defeating Orman in 2014. But like Osborn would do in 2024, Orman criti-

⁹⁷ I exclude Al Gross of Alaska in 2020 and Evan McMullin of Utah in 2022 because they were endorsed by the Democratic Party.

cized Roberts as an out-of-touch Washington politician while himself not pledging to caucus with either party. In the end, Roberts won by portraying Orman as a closeted Democrat, an appeal which had more merit than in Osborn's case because the Democratic candidate in the race, Chad Taylor, had dropped out to boost Orman. Ultimately, this was Roberts's worst election performance in his career. Nevertheless, in the grand scheme of Kansas politics, a Republican winning an election with only 53% of the vote is no shocker as it was for Deb Fischer in Nebraska. Kansas is one of a few non-swing states that has maintained split-ticket voting to this day, as Democrat Laura Kelly has won election to two terms as governor in 2018 and 2022. Orman himself ran as an independent in the 2018 Kansas gubernatorial election, but he finished in a distant third with only 6.5% of the vote. Notably, Kelly won the election in spite of Orman's presence on the ballot as a possible "spoiler".

Does Orman's failure to mobilize a broader movement despite a surprisingly successful first-time candidacy imply that Osborn or other independent candidates have no political future in the agricultural Midwest? I don't think so. That's because Orman and Osborn are two fundamentally different candidates, despite both being independents fed up with the two-party system. While Osborn ran on his working-class credentials as a former veteran and union organizer, Orman is a former McKinsey consultant and private equity manager with close ties to Goldman Sachs director Rajat Gupta, who was convicted and imprisoned for insider trading in 2012.⁹⁸ The reason why Orman's political career died after his 2014 defeat is that he never had much grassroots support to begin with. In a heavily polarized political climate, there's an appeal for nominally nonpartisan politicians like Orman. But when it comes to the actual issues of who holds power and whom the government serves, those nominally nonpartisan politicians typically end up siding with the corporate donors that fund both major parties.

That's the fundamental problem with transpartisan fusionist movements like No Labels. The goal of No Labels is to unite politicians across the aisle to create civil dialogue, but it lacks any sort of policy agenda of its own. All this might end up accomplishing is having like-minded

⁹⁸ Tim Carpenter, "Orman's link to jailed investor deeper than first portrayed," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, September 21, 2014, <https://www.cjonline.com/story/news/politics/elections/2014/09/21/ormans-link-jailed-investor-deeper-first-portrayed/16655477007/>.

Republicans and Democrats unite to pass unpopular legislation that harms the working- and middle-class at the behest of wealthy donors. If anything, it might be more detrimental to American politics because it justifies bad legislation or thwarts good legislation in the name of bipartisanship. The two Senators most prominently associated with No Labels, independents Angus King and Joe Manchin, are both notorious for receiving massive corporate donations.⁹⁹ Americans see through this facade, and it's unsurprising that there was no organic, grassroots support for a No Labels presidential bid in 2024.

Third-party and trans-party movements can only be successful if they have an organic policy agenda of their own. This has been true for each of the successful third-party movements in American history. The Free Soil Party of the 1840s was backed by the nascent abolitionist movement, and it eventually merged with several smaller third parties to form the Republican Party that abolished slavery. The People's Party of the 1890s and its smaller antecedents were backed by the farmers' movement, and its main policy initiatives were eventually enacted by both Republican and Democratic administrations. No trans-party movement has ever succeeded with the sole agenda of bridging the two-party divide. That's why movements like No Labels and candidates like Orman fail.

In the past century, the most successful third-party or independent movement was that of Ross Perot in the 1990s, which developed into the still-extant Reform Party. Perot did campaign on dissatisfaction with the two-party system, but that was far from his central agenda. His main policy objective was the defeat of NAFTA, famously foreseeing “[a giant sucking sound](#)” of jobs leaving the country if it were to pass. Perot, of course, never came close to winning the presidency, but that doesn't mean his movement was a failure. Running on the Reform ticket, Jesse Ventura won the governorship in Minnesota, where he enacted populist economic policies like tax cuts, infrastructure investment, and funding for public education.

After Perot's retirement from politics, there was a battle over control of the movement, in which Donald Trump made his first foray into electoral politics in his first campaign for the presidency. The 2000 Reform presidential primaries resulted in a disastrous schism that

⁹⁹ [King](#) and [Manchin](#)

permanently destroyed the party. After dropping out of the primaries, Trump, identifying himself as a standard if not moderate conservative, derided the party as being led by “a Klansman, [David] Duke, a neo-Nazi, [Pat] Buchanan, and a communist, [Lenora] Fulani. This is not company I wish to keep”.¹⁰⁰ The reason why the Reform coalition collapsed was that it lost the policy agenda that had kept it together under Perot. It became a hodgepodge of fringe figures like Duke, failed Republicans like Buchanan, and perennial candidates like Fulani, united only by opposition to the Democratic and the Republican Parties. And yet out of the ashes of the Reform Party, taking up once again Perot’s central objective of opposing NAFTA, rose Donald Trump in 2016. While the first Trump Administration was far from enacting Perot’s complete agenda, such as balancing the budget, instituting Congressional term limits, or campaign finance reform, he fulfilled his main objective of renegotiating NAFTA, bringing manufacturing jobs back to the United States. The grassroots movement that Perot built never died. Politicians ignored it for decades until Trump embraced it and rode it to the White House.

No third-party or independent candidate after Perot has been nearly as successful. Third-party candidates like Ralph Nader and Jill Stein have been smeared as spoilers. Systemic suppression of third parties, especially [by the Democratic Party](#), has made it practically impossible for them to get any traction. That ultimately proved to be the fatal blow for Robert Kennedy Jr.’s independent presidential campaign. As I explained in Chapter 15, Kennedy built a bipartisan, grassroots coalition focusing on anger over the government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for which he blamed both Presidents Trump and Biden. His internal polling showed him defeating both Trump and Biden head-to-head,¹⁰¹ but the perceived spoiler effect as well as a dramatic decline in support following Harris’s replacement of Biden led him to suspend his campaign. When he ultimately endorsed Trump, many of his supporters accused him of selling out in exchange for political rewards. Their anger is understandable,

¹⁰⁰ Donald Trump, quoted in *The New York Times*, February 14, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/14/nyregion/quotation-of-the-day-815233.html>.

¹⁰¹ “Biden Is the Real Spoiler, Kennedy Only Candidate Who Can Beat Trump,” Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Campaign, May 1, 2024, https://www.mahanow.org/biden_real_spoiler_kennedy_only_candidate_who_can_beat_trump.

as Kennedy had, after all, been a vocal critic of Trump for his entire career. But the true goal of third-party and independent candidacies, beyond the nearly impossible task of winning elections, is to bring their movement to the forefront of politics and force one or both of the major parties to embrace their cause. That's why even though the Free Soil Party of the 1840s and the People's Party of the 1890s had very little electoral success, they can still be considered successful movements. Despite Kennedy and his entire family being lifelong Democrats, the Democratic Party chose to smear him and ostracize his entire movement from the party, following party leadership's long-standing practice of neglecting grassroots organizing. This left Kennedy with nowhere to go but Trump.

Even though Kennedy had major disagreements with Trump, he and Trump engaged in a series of negotiations where Trump agreed to make policy and personnel concessions in exchange for Kennedy's endorsement, especially in Kennedy's core area of health policy. It remains to be seen what impact Kennedy will have as secretary of Health and Human Services in Trump's second administration. If he or Trump are able to end corporate capture of regulatory agencies, to "make America healthy again" through reforms of nutrition programs and guidelines as well as environmental policy, then we should consider his independent presidential candidacy and subsequent Trump endorsement a success. Because Kennedy's proposals are completely opposed to the policies enacted during Trump's first administration, Kennedy's Trump endorsement will have forced the Republican Party to address his core issues where it almost certainly would not have otherwise.¹⁰²

We circle back now to Dan Osborn in Nebraska. All of the above goes to show that Osborn's defeat doesn't mean his movement failed. Osborn himself isn't giving up. Just 2 weeks after the election, he started the Working Class Heroes Fund, a political action committee aimed at encouraging and supporting working-class people to run for office. "Both parties are out of touch with working class voters, and regular people are fed up," he says.¹⁰³ Osborn's

¹⁰² Michelle R. Smith and Josh Funk, "RFK Jr. suggests if Trump is elected, he'll play significant role in agriculture and health policy," PBS, October 15, 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/rfk-jr-suggests-if-trump-is-elected-hell-play-significant-role-in-agriculture-and-health-policy>.

¹⁰³ Aaron Sanderford, "Nebraska's Dan Osborn starts hybrid PAC for working-class candidates," *Nebraska Examiner*, November 19, 2024, <https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2024/11/19/nebraskas-dan-osborn-starts-hybrid-pac-for-working-class-candidates/>.

performance hasn't gone unnoticed. Alert Democratic Party observers are waking up to their loss of the working class to Trump. You'd be forgiven if you thought that Osborn quote was uttered by Bernie Sanders. In an interview with *The Nation*, Sanders touted Osborn's performance as a model for Democrats, especially his pro-union, anti-establishment focus. To Sanders and Osborn, the key to a successful grassroots candidate is working-class roots that give them credibility when they tap into Americans' opposition to the corporate state.

"They're out there. I've met them all over the country—great working-class people starting to run for office and taking on the powerful special interests who have so much power today." - Bernie Sanders¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ John Nichols, "Bernie Sanders: We Need More Working-Class Candidates to Challenge Both Parties," *The Nation*, November 26, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/bernie-sanders-working-class-candidates-challenge-both-parties/>

Conclusion: The Path Forward

In the lead-up to his interview with *The Nation*, Sanders released an email to his supporters where he pointed out the Democratic Party's flaws, namely the Harris campaign's support for the status quo while Trump campaigned for change. He outlined a series of objectives the Democratic Party needs to fulfill in order to rebuild its image:¹⁰⁵

- Building a multiracial, multigenerational, working-class party
- Pursuing a fifty-state strategy not limited to swing states or districts
- Ending billionaires' ability to buy elections
- Recruiting working-class candidates for office
- Supporting independent candidates who oppose both major parties
- Supporting unions
- Listening to voters that did not vote Democratic
- Using social media to combat lies from billionaires and Republicans
- Building sustainable, long-term grassroots organizing structures that exist beyond one campaign

In this analysis, I've written extensively about Trump's multicultural, multiracial, working-class coalition; the fifty-state strategy; independent candidates and their movements; and the need for grassroots organizing. Sanders is absolutely correct that these are essential objectives for rebuilding the Democratic Party; to some extent, the Trump campaign did all that in 2024.

Trump won this election by following the Republican Party's long-standing embrace of the people left behind by the coastal, urban elites of the Democratic Party. He flipped back Georgia because of the rural South's continuing shift to the right in the 21st century. He took back Arizona off the strength of increased support from Latinos, a group particularly harmed by illegal immigration and inflation. He won Nevada by embracing the state's automatic voter registration program to turn out first-time voters struggling under the Biden–Harris

¹⁰⁵ Jon Queally, "Sanders Says There Is No Choice: 'We Must Defeat the Oligarchs,'" Common Dreams, November 30, 2024, <https://www.commondreams.org/news/bernie-sanders-oligarchy>.

economy. This economic message hit hardest in the nation's major metropolises, not only in competitive Philadelphia to help him win back Pennsylvania but also in deep-blue New York, where he saw his largest gains in the country. He won Michigan by embracing the Arab-American community's opposition to major wars in the Middle East, while the Biden–Harris Administration unapologetically embraced the worst warmongers who cheerlead those wars. And he won Wisconsin for the same reason he won it, Michigan, and Pennsylvania in 2016: by being the only candidate who listened to voters whose communities have been thinned out and fallen into despair as wages have fallen and jobs been sent abroad.

All these are specific examples of Trump's successes in 2024, but the true reason for his victory that underlies all those state-by-state trends was that he and his campaign understood the need to build a grassroots coalition. Where the Electoral College elects the president and each state is represented equally in the Senate, diverse coalitions are needed. I go back to JD Vance's 2021 statement of his goal being to create a multicultural, multiracial, working-class party. The Republican Party did so this election by focusing on issues that materially impact voters. The Democratic Party's appeal of "democracy" was never going to work outside of wealthy cities and exurbs. Its procedure of choosing its presidential nominee, i.e. declaring Biden is the nominee, then declaring that he isn't the nominee anymore, then declaring just as suddenly that Harris is now the nominee, is the complete antithesis of grassroots coalition building.

Will the Democratic Party learn from its mistakes? Sanders doesn't think so. In his aforementioned email to supporters, Sanders doesn't give reason to raise his supporters' hopes. While the objectives he listed ought to be uncontroversial, he actually presents them as unanswered questions: "How do we expand our efforts to build a multi-racial, multi-generational working-class movement?" He doesn't have the answers, because the consultant class of the Democratic Party completely and utterly rejects these objectives. He asks and then answers:

“Will the Democratic leadership learn the lessons of their defeat and create a party that stands with the working class and is prepared to take on the enormously powerful special interests that dominate our economy, our media and our political life?

Highly unlikely.”

We don’t have to take Sanders’s word for it. Let’s look at how Democratic Party leadership responded to Sanders when he first made this critique the day after the election. DNC Chair Jaime Harrison called Sanders’s critique “straight up BS” while hailing Biden as the most pro-worker president of his lifetime.¹⁰⁶ In an interview with *The New York Times Magazine*, Nancy Pelosi asserted that “I don’t respect him for saying that the Democratic Party has abandoned the working-class families”.¹⁰⁷ Jim Clyburn, the former House Majority Whip and kingmaker in the 2020 Democratic Party presidential primaries (safe to say, that alone makes him a long-time foe of Sanders), said that Democrats just need to “chill out for a while”,¹⁰⁸ seemingly denying the existence of any problem altogether.

Central to Democratic leaders’ denials that there’s a problem is the claim that the working-class actually prospered during the Biden Administration, and that voters’ perceptions of a bad economy were a sign of their ignorance. This argument was outlined exactly in an [MSNBC opinion piece](#) written by Michael A. Cohen. In addition to writing off working-class voters as hopelessly lost causes due to their support of “a racist demagogue”, Cohen makes such wildly inaccurate claims like “the Democrats’ political coalition is liberal and overwhelmingly black”. It is true that black voters did not move as heavily to the right as other racial groups this election, with black women actually moving to the left, but it is absolutely false that black people make up an “overwhelming” share of the Democratic coalition. The two solutions Cohen

¹⁰⁶ Jaime Harrison (@harrisonjaime), “This is straight up BS... Biden was the most-pro worker President of my life time- saved Union pensions, created millions of good paying jobs and even marched in”, X, November 7, 2024, 9:51 AM EST, <https://x.com/harrisonjaime/status/1854537146830348292>.

¹⁰⁷ Lulu Garcia-Navarro, “The Interview: Nancy Pelosi Insists the Election Was Not a Rebuke of the Democrats,” *The New York Times Magazine*, interview transcript, November 9, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/09/magazine/nancy-pelosi-election-interview.html>.

¹⁰⁸ “The Daily Report,” “Jim Clyburn on the problems the Democratic Party faces,” CBS News, November 7, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOaqxYIVxSU>.

offers are for the Democratic Party to simply change nothing, or to double down on its appeal to college-educated, suburban voters. In other words, he praises Democrats for not abandoning the working class, but also argues that they ought to abandon it going forward. That's about as obviously self-defeating as it gets. Chuck Schumer already outlined this strategy in 2016 when he infamously declared that, "For every blue-collar Democrat we lose in western Pennsylvania, we will pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs in Philadelphia, and you can repeat that in Ohio and Illinois and Wisconsin".¹⁰⁹ News flash—it didn't happen.

As Sanders states in his interview with *The Nation*, opposition to his (in my view, entirely correct) analysis of the election and path forward for the Democratic Party stems from the party's ruling consultant class, "whose ideology is to tinker around the edges of a grossly unjust and unfair oligarchic system". That's the core problem with how the Democratic Party operates. Democratic Party campaigns are predominantly run by urban consultants whose only methods are running ads that make them rich. Indeed, the Harris campaign has left the DNC in severe debt as it needs to pay back the hundreds of millions of dollars it gave to consulting firms.¹¹⁰

Monmouth College Professor Robin Johnson, a long-time Democratic consultant in rural Illinois, asserts that this strategy has kept Democrats hopelessly uncompetitive in rural America. He says that "We're either talking about winning elections or making the consultants rich".¹¹¹ Particularly detrimental is Democrats' seeming obsession with elevating losing candidates like Stacey Abrams, Beto O'Rourke, and especially Jaime Harrison as effective organizers who will restore Democrats' fortunes in red states. Harrison in particular is a career lobbyist from the Podesta Group, having lobbied on behalf of Wall Street and Big Pharma. He's a typical Washington insider completely out-of-touch with rural America. He represents those special interests that control politicians, who make decisions detrimental to the Ameri-

¹⁰⁹ *Road to the White House*, "Every Blue Collar Democrat," C-Span, July 27, 2016, <https://www.c-span.org/clip/public-affairs-event/user-clip-every-blue-collar-democrat/4632402>.

¹¹⁰ Donald Shaw, "The Democratic Consultants Getting Rich off the Harris Campaign," Sludge, November 13, 2024, <https://readsludge.com/2024/11/13/the-democratic-consultants-getting-rich-off-the-harris-campaign-2/>.

¹¹¹ Justin Perkins and Joel Bleifuss, "This Rural Political Strategist Says Democrats Need to Learn from Winners," Barn Raiser, November 11, 2024, <https://barnraisingmedia.com/this-rural-political-strategist-says-democrats-need-to-learn-from-winners/>.

can economy but who are not only shielded from the consequences of their actions, but also enriched by their crimes.

There are two types of losing candidates that Democrats can choose to follow: the losers who lucked their way into close elections by facing horrible Republicans, like Jaime Harrison, or the losers who genuinely came close to winning off the strength of grassroots organizing, like Dan Osborn. When given this choice, Democrats inevitably choose the former because there's no money to be made in deep canvassing or door-knocking. The money is to be made in television ads and selling politicians a script of talking points. Never mind that this is completely ineffective in rural America. The bottom line for the consultant class and the party's ruling elite matters more than winning elections.

Ever since he reached national prominence with his 2016 presidential campaign, Bernie Sanders has been warning Democrats that they're losing the working class. The Democratic Party has consistently responded by marginalizing him, from rigging the 2016 primary against him to shutting down his entirely accurate critique of the party's operations after this election. That's because the ruling elites of the Democratic Party (from the Clinton team to Rahm Emanuel to Chuck Schumer to Nancy Pelosi to Jaime Harrison; Wall Street is the core tie among these figures) see him as a genuine threat to their power. They saw how Donald Trump completely took over the Republican Party and proscribed its entire ruling elite (Paul Ryan, Mitch McConnell, the Cheneys, etc.). They feared that Sanders and his movement would do the same to them. If Democrats truly desire to create a party that consistently wins elections, the way forward is clear. Bernie Sanders has laid it out.

That means embracing grassroots movements and returning to the fifty-state strategy that was so successful in the late 2000s. To that point, the fifty-state strategy isn't just Jaime Harrison showing up in Connecticut to throw cash at the state party. It means establishing grassroots movements at the local level, which can grow into grassroots movements at the state level, which then grow into grassroots movements at the national level. They should look to Osborn for guidance, as a candidate who has truly run a competitive election in a deep-red state. I'd add Kennedy to this mix too, but one could make an effective argument that his skepticism of vaccines and willingness to deviate so far from the Democratic agenda

make him an unsuitable candidate. That being said, there is a Democrat who has recently won a statewide election in a deep-red state while maintaining the core Democratic policy agenda. I'm not talking about practical, if not actual, independents like Joe Manchin. I'm also not talking about Jon Tester and Laura Kelly, who were barely able to crack 50% in their elections, if at all. I'm talking about Andy Beshear.



Despite being carried twice by Bill Clinton, Kentucky is now a solidly Republican state that's only been shifting further to the right during the Trump era, which can largely be attributed to opposition to the Democratic Party's environmentalist positions on the Eastern Kentucky Coalfield; the same trend has been playing out in neighboring West Virginia on a much grander level. That makes Beshear's victory as a Democrat in 2023 all the more impressive. Central to his support is his popularity among Republicans. In the lead-up to the 2023 election, Beshear maintained an insane 41% approval rating among Kentuckians who voted for Trump in 2020. This comes despite Beshear's strong support of the Biden–Harris Administration and Biden's own 68% unpopularity in Kentucky.¹¹² So how does Beshear do it?

¹¹² Tessa Duvall, "Beshear tied for most popular Democratic governor among Trump voters, survey finds," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, October 31, 2023, <https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article281207713.html>.

It's grassroots appeal: the sense that Beshear actually cares about the people of Kentucky, especially those in rural Kentucky. In addition to COVID-19, the state was hit by many crises during Beshear's first term as governor, including a major tornado in Western Kentucky and severe flooding in Eastern Kentucky. Beshear was present through all these crises, giving daily COVID briefings and personally visiting impacted areas. Eastern Kentucky, in the heart of Appalachia, is a region that's long been neglected. Unlike national Democrats and even Kentucky Republicans like Mitch McConnell, Beshear has demonstrated that he cares about the left-behind and forgotten people of Kentucky. Electorally, his gains were largest in the counties hit hardest by the flooding, even winning a county that Trump won with 76.5% of the vote in 2020 and then 79.2% in 2024.¹¹³ Beshear's support in Eastern Kentucky goes beyond just disaster relief. As governor, he's overseen some of the largest infrastructure investments in state history, such as a new toll-free bridge crossing the Ohio River to Cincinnati, the expansion of the Mountain Parkway, and high-speed internet for all Kentuckians. Under Beshear, Kentucky became the fifth-best state in the entire nation for business and infrastructure investment.¹¹⁴ He's enacted a popular economic agenda that includes tax cuts and increased funding of public education. All these policies make him popular even among Republicans. Even though he's a liberal, Biden/Harris-supporting Democrat, Republicans and independents will vote for him because his policies have materially benefited them.

It's candidates like Dan Osborn and Andy Beshear that Democrats need to nominate in order to win in Republican states. Beshear and Jaime Harrison in South Carolina were both exceptional fundraisers, with Beshear quadrupling Republican challenger Daniel Cameron's money raised and Harrison breaking the fundraising record in all of Senate history.¹¹⁵ But even though South Carolina is much less Republican than Kentucky, it was Beshear that won while Harrison lost overwhelmingly to a horrible Republican candidate in Lindsey Graham.

¹¹³ [Perry County](#)

¹¹⁴ Office of the Governor, "Gov. Beshear: Kentucky Ranks No. 5 Nationally for Business and Infrastructure Investments," October 23, 2023, <https://www.kentucky.gov/Pages/Activity-stream.aspx?n=GovernorBeshear&prId=1993>.

¹¹⁵ Meg Kinnard, "Despite massive Democratic fundraise, Graham easily wins SC," Associated Press, November 4, 2020, <https://apnews.com/despite-massive-democratic-fundraise-graham-easily-wins-sc-8e132424f3f468c8aaf9806ba2c2c965>.

Beshear was able to win Republicans where Harrison wasn't because of his populist economic agenda. All Harrison had to offer was his ties to the party boss Jim Clyburn and a career lobbying for Wall Street and Big Pharma. Naturally, Harrison was the one anointed as chair of the DNC.

In 2024, Kamala Harris campaigned with Liz Cheney with the thought that she would help court moderate Republicans. This strategy absolutely backfired, working perhaps only in the exurbs of Milwaukee. It was a horrible move because Cheney doesn't command any organic support base. Her father's approval rating was near 10%. You don't attract Republican voters by propping up Republican rejects. Trump was able to reject the previous ruling class of the Republican Party—the Paul Ryans and the Dick Cheneys—without taking any major hit to his coalition because those politicians never had grassroots support to begin with. If anything, those rejected figures were liabilities to Republicans. So too did they become liabilities to Democrats. If the Republican Party wants to remain in power after Trump, it should keep these figures far away from power and embrace the multicultural, multiracial, working-class coalition. It should also do away with election deniers like Kari Lake, Kelli Ward, and Kristina Karamo for good.

If the Democratic Party wants to reclaim power, it should reject its current ruling Wall Street elite, the likes of the Clintons, Jaime Harrison, and Rahm Emanuel. Apparently, Rahm Emanuel wasn't satisfied with his retirement job as Ambassador to Japan during the Biden Administration, so he's now toying with running for office again. He won't run for DNC chair, but some commentators are now floating him as a 2028 presidential candidate.¹¹⁶ That's a smart move if Democrats never want to win another election. In his own 2024 election post-mortem in the *Washington Post*, Emanuel accurately describes many of the Democratic Party's failures that I pointed out in this analysis, going back to the Iraq War and Obama's failure to prosecute any bankers for their criminal activities leading up to the Great Recession. He is completely in agreement with me on the Democratic Party's obsession with DEI, the need to take a strong stance on border security, the need to nominate working-class candidates

¹¹⁶ Shia Kapos, "Rahm Emanuel for president?" *Politico*, December 18, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/illinois-playbook/2024/12/18/rahm-emanuel-for-president-00195012>.

representative of the electorate, and the effectiveness of down-ballot Democrats like George Whitesides and Derek Tran.¹¹⁷ Of course, he conveniently fails to mention that he has been the Democratic Party's single most damaging cheerleader for Wall Street and opponent of grassroots organizing. His analysis is spot-on, showing that he completely understands what it takes to forge a successful coalition. But why has he spent his entire career pursuing the exact opposite strategies? It's because those opposite strategies are where the money is to be made. And that's the fundamental flaw underlying our political system.

¹¹⁷ Rahm Emanuel, "The road back to power for Democrats," *Washington Post*, December 17, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/12/17/rahm-emmanuel-2024-democrats/>.

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