

2024 U.S. Presidential Election Strategy Evaluation Report

Kamala Harris-Tim Walz vs. Donald Trump-J.D. Vance

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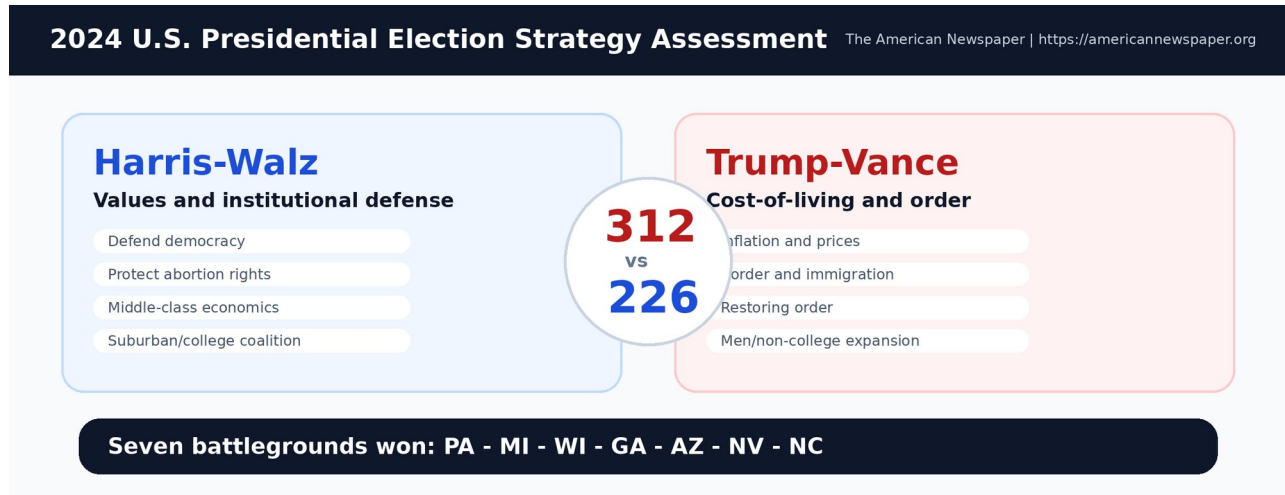


Figure 1. Strategic contrast: institutional defense vs. cost-of-living and order politics.

Bottom-line judgment

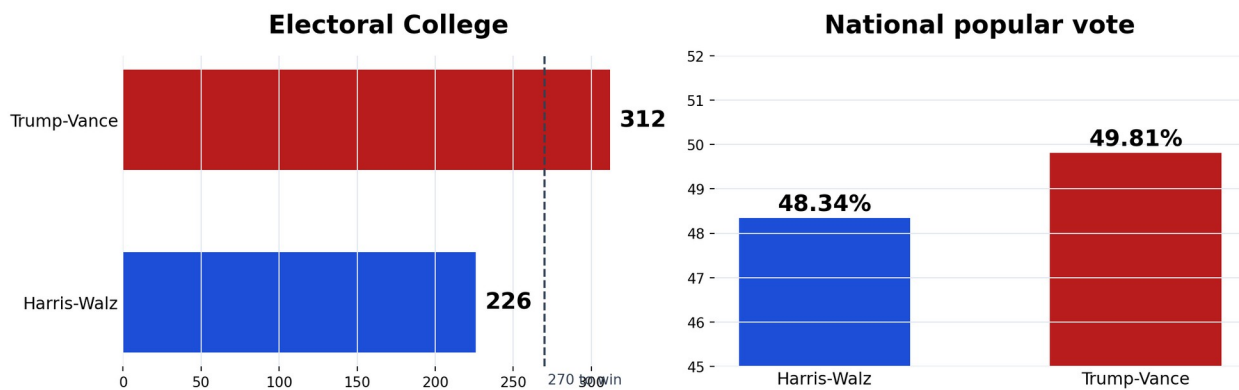
The 2024 presidential election was not simply a referendum on Trump. It was a referendum on the Biden-Harris governing environment, especially inflation, cost of living, immigration and border control. Harris built a values-and-rights campaign; Trump converted economic frustration and border anxiety into a disciplined Electoral College strategy.

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Executive Summary

1. Trump-Vance won the 2024 election by 312 to 226 Electoral College votes and led the national popular vote by 49.81% to 48.34%. [1][2]
2. The decisive operational fact was Republican victory in all seven core battlegrounds: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia, Arizona, Nevada and North Carolina. [2]
3. The election was not best explained by Trump favorability alone. It was driven by cost-of-living pressure, immigration anxiety, demand for order and anti-elite backlash.
4. Harris-Walz retained strength among college-educated voters, women, Black voters, urban and suburban voters, and voters motivated by abortion rights and democratic norms. [4][5]
5. Trump-Vance held the white non-college base while improving among Latino voters, younger men, some Black men, rural and exurban voters, and low-propensity voters. [4][5][6]
6. Abortion rights helped Democrats, but they did not fully override economic and immigration concerns in the presidential vote. [5][7]
7. The democracy message was powerful for Democratic core voters but too abstract and defensive for many economically stressed or low-propensity voters. [3][5]
8. Republicans had a stronger cultural fit with podcasts, YouTube, X, TikTok and male influencer networks; Democrats had a more conventional campaign communications architecture. [8][9][10]
9. Democrats retained a strong field model, but Republicans used outside organizations, Super PACs and alternative media more efficiently for targeted mobilization. [11][12]
10. Strategically, 2024 was both a referendum election and a sign of party-system realignment around education, gender, class, region and cultural identity.

2024 Presidential Election Results Dashboard



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Figure 2. The national vote was close; the Electoral College outcome was decisive.

I. Scope and Method

This report evaluates the 2024 U.S. presidential election through the lens of campaign strategy: issue framing, voter coalition design, candidate risk, battleground targeting, field organization, money, media channels, digital campaigning, polling interpretation, turnout and demographic movement. It draws on official election results, AP VoteCast, Roper Center exit poll aggregation, Pew Research Center validated-voter analysis, Catalist post-election analysis, KFF abortion-related voting analysis, and campaign-finance and media reporting.

The analytical question is not whether Democrats simply failed or Republicans simply succeeded. The central question is how a relatively close national vote translated into a decisive Electoral College victory - and why Republican messages on cost of living, immigration and order outperformed Democratic messages on abortion rights, democracy and Trump risk.

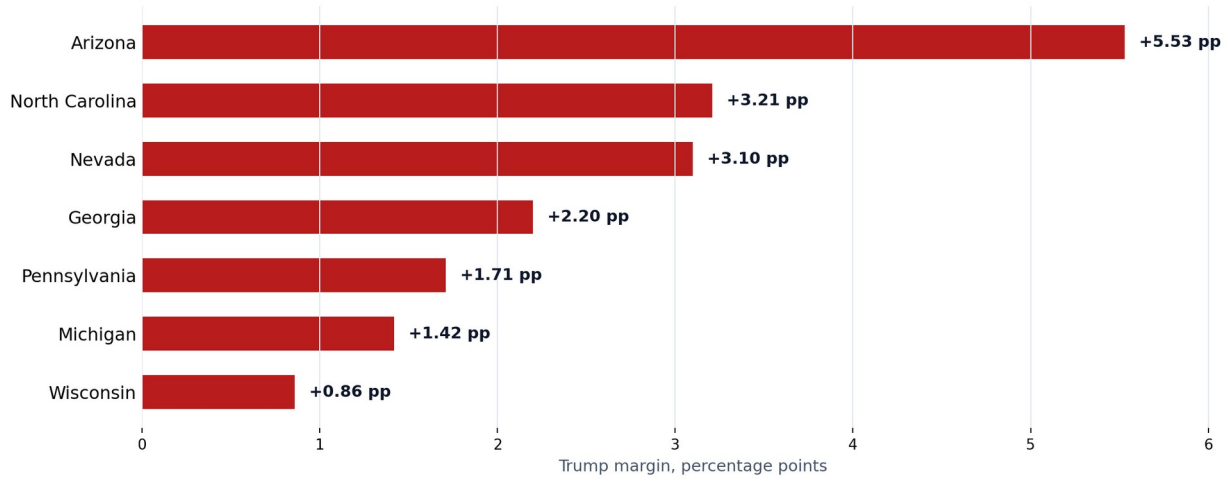
Dimension	Harris-Walz Democratic strategy	Trump-Vance Republican strategy	Strategic verdict
Political environment	Defend the governing record while offering generational change.	Turn economic and border dissatisfaction into a referendum on Biden-Harris.	Republican advantage
Core message	Democracy, abortion rights, middle-class economics, Trump risk.	Cost of living, border, order, anti-elite politics, national strength.	Republican message was simpler and more visceral.
Coalition target	College-educated voters, women, Black voters, urban/suburban voters, abortion-rights voters.	Non-college voters, men, rural/exurban voters, evangelical voters, Latino men, low-propensity voters.	Republicans expanded in more electorally efficient places.
Candidate risk	Harris had limited time to build a stand-alone brand and carried the Biden administration burden.	Trump had known legal and democratic-risk liabilities, but many voters had already priced them in.	Trump risk was less newly salient than Harris continuity risk.
Field model	Traditional ground game, unions, offices, data and canvassing.	Outsourced field, Super PACs, low-propensity targeting and alternative media reinforcement.	Mixed: Democrats stronger institutionally; Republicans more efficient culturally.
Media ecosystem	Legacy media, television, official digital, women/young voter outreach.	Podcasts, YouTube, X, TikTok, influencer networks, male-coded media culture.	Republican advantage in nontraditional persuasion space.

II. Election Result: Close Popular Vote, Decisive Electoral College

The 2024 result combined a modest national vote margin with a clear Electoral College outcome. Trump-Vance won 312 electoral votes to Harris-Walz 226. In the national popular vote, Trump received 77,303,568 votes, or 49.81%, while Harris received 75,019,230 votes, or 48.34%. [1][2]

The core operational fact was that Trump won every major battleground: Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia, Arizona, Nevada and North Carolina. Some margins were narrow, especially Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, but the accumulation of small shifts across the map produced a decisive national outcome.

Seven key battlegrounds: Trump margin



The American Newspaper | <https://americannewspaper.org> - Source: American Presidency Project state results

Figure 3. Trump swept the seven battlegrounds that determined the Electoral College path.

Battleground state	Harris vote share	Trump vote share	Trump margin	Strategic meaning
Pennsylvania	48.66%	50.37%	+1.71 pp / about 120,266 votes	The decisive Blue Wall state; non-college, energy and small-town voters were pivotal.
Michigan	48.31%	49.73%	+1.42 pp / about 80,103 votes	Labor anxiety, Arab American/Muslim disaffection and uneven Black turnout hurt Democrats.
Wisconsin	48.84%	49.70%	+0.86 pp / about 29,397 votes	Madison, Milwaukee and suburbs were not enough to offset rural and small-town GOP consolidation.
Georgia	48.53%	50.73%	+2.20 pp / about 115,100 votes	Atlanta suburban growth and Black turnout did not recreate the 2020 Democratic coalition.
Arizona	46.69%	52.22%	+5.53 pp / about 187,382 votes	Border politics, housing costs and Latino male movement strongly favored Trump.
Nevada	47.49%	50.59%	+3.10 pp / about 46,008 votes	Service-sector costs, working-class pressure and Latino voter movement were central.
North Carolina	47.65%	50.86%	+3.21 pp / about 183,048 votes	Rural, evangelical and non-college white strength continued to block a Democratic breakthrough.

III. Democratic Strategy: Reassembling the Biden Coalition Under Pressure

The Harris-Walz strategy had four main components. First, mobilize women and suburban voters around abortion rights after Dobbs. Second, frame Trump as a threat to democracy, the rule of law and constitutional order. Third, defend the administration with a middle-class economic program around housing, prescription drugs, taxes and corporate greed. Fourth, use Tim Walz to soften the ticket in the Midwest and connect with teachers, unions, small towns and working-class cultural signals.

The structural problem was that Harris was both a change candidate and a continuity candidate. She was younger and different from Biden, but she was also the sitting vice president. Voters evaluating inflation, border management and the condition of the country did not separate her fully from the administration. The campaign had policies, but it struggled to convert them into a single memorable economic sentence.

Democratic strategic weakness

The campaign had many policy answers but lacked one dominant emotional answer to the voter question: why does life feel more expensive, and who will change it?

IV. Republican Strategy: Translating Referendum Politics Into Everyday Grievance

The Trump-Vance strategy was less complex and more repetitive: prices are up, the border is broken, disorder is rising, elites ignore you, and Trump will restore control. As policy, the message was often blunt. As campaign strategy, it was powerful because it was concrete, emotional and easy to repeat.

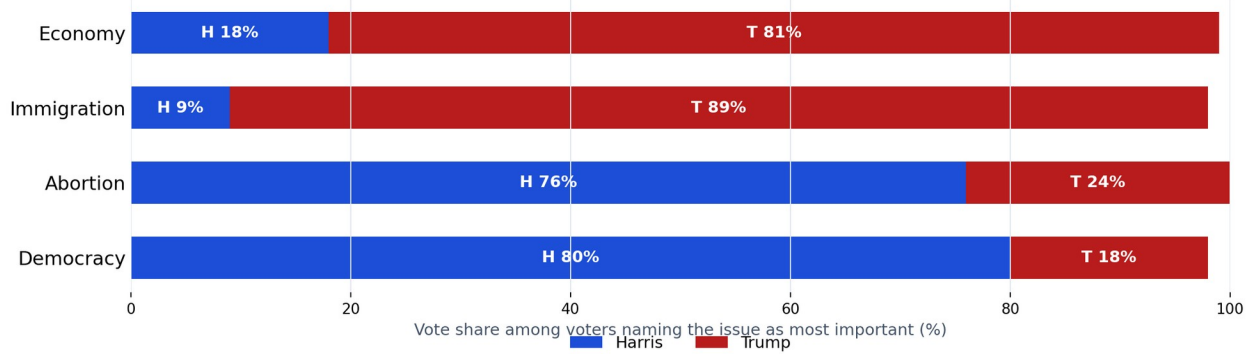
Trump did not discuss the economy primarily through GDP, unemployment rates or legislative achievements. He talked through grocery bills, gasoline, rent, car insurance, mortgage rates and the impossibility of buying a home. Immigration was reframed not merely as a border question but as a pressure point on crime, schools, hospitals, wages, housing and public order. Vance reinforced the idea that Democrats had culturally abandoned non-college and working-class voters, particularly in the industrial Midwest.

Republican strategic strength

The campaign turned frustration into identity: if you feel squeezed by prices, unsettled by the border and ignored by elites, Trump is your instrument of disruption.

V. Issue Battlefield

Issue ownership: asymmetric candidate advantage



The American Newspaper | <https://americannewspaper.org> - Source: Roper Center exit poll aggregation

Figure 4. Economy and immigration were Republican-owned issues; abortion and democracy were Democratic-owned issues. The strategic problem for Democrats was issue salience.

Issue	Democratic frame	Republican frame	Election effect
Inflation and cost of living	Middle-class support, lower drug and housing costs, corporate greed.	Biden-Harris inflation, unaffordable daily life, worse than four years ago.	Republicans won the intuitive and emotional version of the economic argument.
Immigration and border	Orderly immigration, bipartisan border bill, Trump obstruction.	Border collapse, crime, public-service burden, mass deportation and control.	Democrats were defensive; Republicans owned the order frame.
Crime and disorder	Community safety, gun violence prevention, reform and local investment.	Law and order, urban disorder, migrant crime, decline.	Republicans converted diffuse anxiety into a simple security message.
Abortion rights	Freedom, bodily autonomy, Dobbs backlash, protecting women.	State authority, avoid national-ban language, pivot to economy.	Helped Democrats, but did not dominate the presidential choice.
Democracy	January 6, authoritarian risk, rule of law.	Political persecution, deep state, anti-elite resistance.	Strong among core Democrats, limited with cost-pressured swing and low-propensity voters.

1. Economy and inflation: the central battlefield

The economy was the practical center of the election. Even when macroeconomic indicators improved, voters remembered the accumulated price level. Wage gains were uneven and abstract; groceries, rent, insurance and interest rates were repeated daily signals. In Roper Center exit poll aggregation, voters naming the economy as the most important issue broke overwhelmingly for Trump. [5]

The Democratic economic message was substantive but fragmented. The Republican message was simpler: you are worse off than four years ago. Campaigns often reward the message that feels true before it is fact-checked.

2. Immigration and border control: from regional issue to national order politics

Immigration became a national order issue. Republicans connected it to crime, wages, housing, schools, hospitals and urban budgets. Democrats emphasized a bipartisan border bill and Trump obstruction, but

for many voters the more direct question was why the incumbent administration had not already restored control.

3. Abortion rights: powerful but not sufficient

Abortion rights were one of the Democrats' strongest issues. The limitation was conversion. Some voters could support abortion-rights ballot measures at the state level while voting Republican for president on economic or immigration grounds. KFF analysis of 2024 abortion-related ballot initiatives showed that abortion protections could win even where Democratic presidential performance lagged. [7]

4. Democracy: morally strong, electorally constrained

The democracy message was morally serious and mobilized high-information Democrats. But for lower-information, economically stressed or anti-institutional voters, it could sound abstract, elite or defensive. Trump's January 6 and legal liabilities were severe, but by 2024 they were not new information. Many voters had already priced them into their view of Trump and still prioritized prices, border control and perceived strength.

VI. Voter Coalition and Demographic Movement

The major structural story was the continuing education, gender and class realignment. Democrats were strong among college-educated voters, women, Black voters, secular voters, urban voters and many suburban voters. Republicans retained strong white non-college support while improving among Latino voters, younger men, some Black men and low-propensity voters. Pew's validated-voter analysis found Harris only narrowly ahead among Hispanic voters, Trump improved with Black voters compared with 2020, and men under 50 moved further toward Trump. [4]

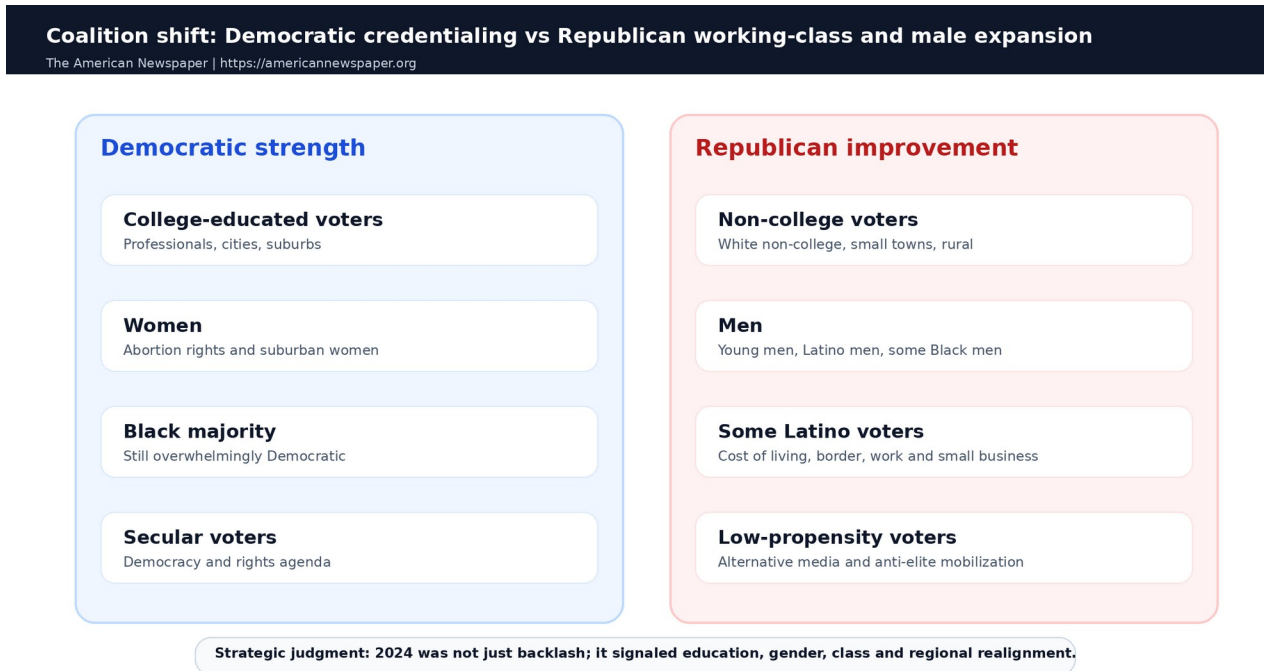


Figure 5. The coalition shift followed education, gender, class and region.

Group	Democratic strength	Republican strength or improvement	Strategic interpretation
College-educated voters	Professionals, urban/suburban voters, college-educated women, democracy and rights agenda.	Some affluent and business voters remained responsive to taxes, regulation and anti-elite rhetoric.	Democrats became more clearly the party of credentialed voters.
Non-college voters	Union pockets, public-sector workers, some Black and Latino working-class voters.	White non-college voters, men, rural and small-town voters.	Republicans deepened their class base.
Urban/suburban/rural	Large cities and educated suburbs.	Rural, exurban and small-town consolidation.	Suburban women were not enough to offset rural and small-town margins.
Men and women	Women, especially abortion-rights and suburban women.	Men, young men, Latino men and some Black men.	The gender gap became a core electoral cleavage.
Black, Latino, Asian voters	Black voters remained heavily Democratic; Asian voters leaned Democratic; Latino voters split more competitively.	Latino men and some Black men reduced Democratic margins.	The assumption that nonwhite voters are automatically Democratic weakened.
Gen Z and Millennials	Young women and college-educated youth.	Young men and economically anxious young voters.	Youth politics split by gender and education.
Evangelicals, Catholics, secular voters	Secular and nonreligious voters.	White evangelicals and conservative Catholics.	Religion remained tied to cultural conflict.
Working and middle classes	Unions, public sector and progressive professionals.	Private-sector workers, small business, exurban middle class, cost-of-living voters.	Cost pressure pushed class politics toward Republicans.

VII. Battleground Targeting: Rust Belt vs. Sun Belt

1. Rust Belt: small movements with large Electoral College consequences

Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin were still close. Democrats aimed to combine Black urban voters, college towns, unions, suburban women and college-educated voters. Republicans concentrated on white non-college voters, small towns, rural counties, energy and manufacturing voters, and male working-class identity. Trump's Rust Belt victory was not a massive realignment in vote margin; it was the accumulation of small movements in electorally decisive places.

- Pennsylvania: Democratic strength in Philadelphia suburbs and Pittsburgh was offset by western and central Pennsylvania, energy politics, non-college voters and small-town consolidation.
- Michigan: Automotive-sector uncertainty, working-class economic anxiety, Arab American and Muslim dissatisfaction, and uneven Black turnout placed Democrats under pressure.
- Wisconsin: Madison, Milwaukee and suburban women kept Democrats competitive, but rural and small-town Republican consolidation produced a narrow Trump win.

2. Sun Belt: border, housing costs and multiracial working-class pressure

Georgia, Arizona, Nevada and North Carolina required Democrats to maintain a multiracial suburban growth coalition. Republicans attacked through border security, housing costs, service-sector cost pressure, Latino male movement, Black turnout gaps and rural consolidation.

- Georgia: Atlanta suburban growth and Black mobilization did not reproduce the 2020 coalition.
- Arizona: Border politics, housing costs and Latino male movement overwhelmed Democratic abortion-rights advantages.

- Nevada: Service-sector economics, cost of living and Latino working-class pressure favored Republicans.
- North Carolina: The Democratic long-term target remained blocked by rural, evangelical and non-college white strength.

VIII. Media, Digital and Influencer Strategy

The 2024 campaign showed the growing power of podcasts, YouTube, X, TikTok, influencers and streaming culture. Pew reported that 21% of U.S. adults, and 37% of adults ages 18-29, regularly get news from social media news influencers. [8]

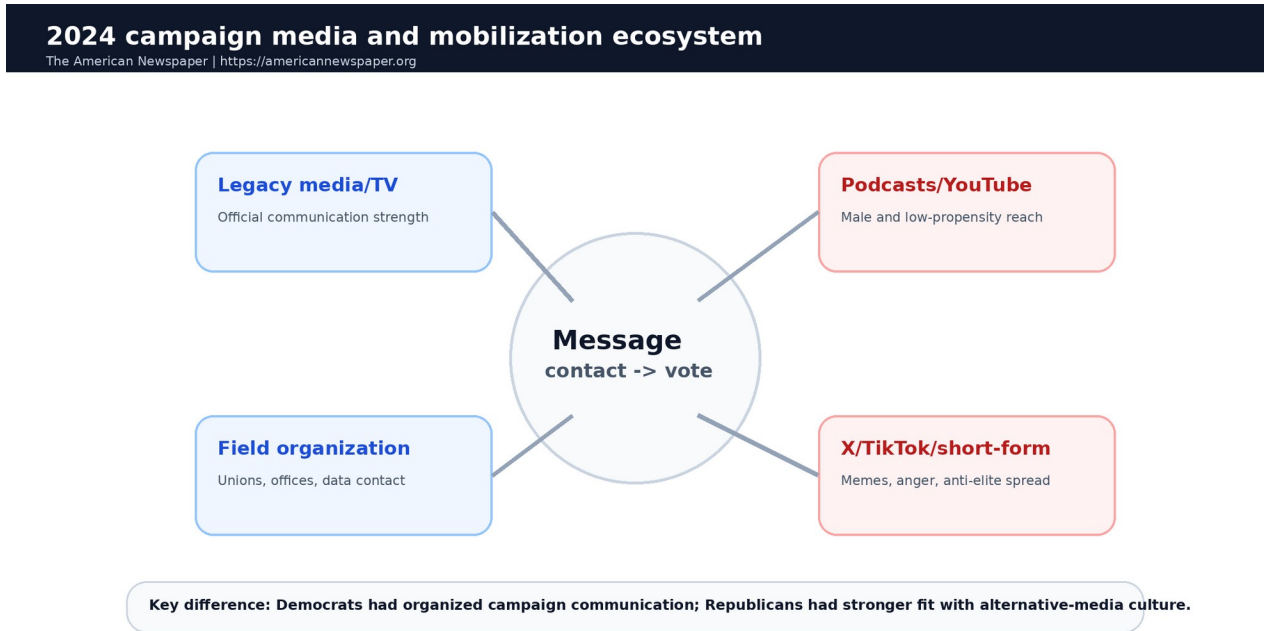


Figure 6. Democrats had stronger formal campaign communications; Republicans had stronger cultural fit in alternative media.

Channel	Democratic use	Republican use	Assessment
Legacy media and TV	Official interviews, television ads, mainstream coverage.	Agenda-setting through controversy and earned media, despite low trust in mainstream outlets.	Democrats had formal advantage; Republicans often drove attention.
Cable news	MSNBC/CNN-adjacent mobilization.	Fox News and conservative media ecosystem.	Each side reinforced its core base.
Podcasts and YouTube	Selective expansion, including women and youth-oriented formats.	Male-coded podcasts, comedy, combat-sports and long-form political conversation.	Republican advantage.
X	Official messaging and rapid response.	Musk-friendly environment and conservative anti-elite networks.	Republican advantage.
TikTok and short-form	Youth outreach, memes, creator credentialing.	Young-male targeting and anger/economy short-form content.	Mixed, but GOP had stronger cultural fit with young male audiences.
Influencers	Organized creator programs.	Looser, more organic pro-Trump ecosystem.	Republican advantage in authenticity and repetition.

Harris used modern campaign tools, including Twitch, creator credentialing and digital staffing. But platform presence is not the same as cultural command. Trump moved more naturally through the language of alternative media: humor, grievance, masculinity, anti-elite anger and viral repetition. Reuters

reported that the Trump campaign planned TikTok efforts targeting young male voters with inflation and economic messaging. [9][10]

IX. Organization, Money and Outside Groups

Democrats retained a more traditional ground-game model: field offices, unions, canvassing, data, voter protection and formal turnout operations. The weakness of this model in 2024 was not necessarily contact volume; it was persuasion. A campaign can contact a voter repeatedly and still fail if the message does not answer the voter's felt problem.

Republicans used a riskier but potentially more efficient model: outside organizations, Super PACs, alternative media reinforcement and low-propensity targeting. The Guardian reported that Trump's battleground field operation relied in part on America PAC, backed by Elon Musk, to target low-propensity Trump supporters. Brennan Center analysis found that candidate-supporting Super PACs became more dependent on very large donors in 2024, with especially large growth on the Trump side. [11][12]

Organizational verdict

Democrats looked more like a high-cost regular army; Republicans looked more like an externalized, media-amplified mobilization network. The Democratic model has quality-control advantages. The Republican model had lower cultural friction and higher efficiency in reaching certain low-propensity voters.

X. Why Democratic Messages Underperformed

11. The cost-of-living environment made the incumbent-party burden extremely difficult to overcome.
12. Harris could not fully separate herself from Biden administration evaluations on inflation and border control.
13. The democracy message mobilized the base but had limited reach among economically stressed and low-propensity voters.
14. Abortion rights helped but did not automatically convert into presidential votes, especially among voters prioritizing prices and immigration.
15. The campaign had many policy proposals but lacked one dominant emotional economic story.
16. Young men, Latino men and some Black men were not reached with a sufficiently persuasive identity-and-economy message.
17. Democratic reliance on college-educated and suburban voters left the party exposed in rural, exurban and small-town geographies.
18. Trump's liabilities were already known; the marginal persuasive value of warning voters about them was limited.
19. Traditional field capacity could not compensate for message mismatch.
20. The campaign operated under severe time pressure after Biden's withdrawal and had limited runway to define Harris independently.

XI. Why Republican Messages Worked

21. The cost-of-living message was concrete, repeated and emotionally immediate.
22. Immigration was successfully broadened into a national order issue.
23. Trump was framed not as a normal incumbent challenger but as an instrument of disruption.

24. The campaign maintained overwhelming strength among white non-college voters.
25. Republicans reduced Democratic margins among Latino voters, younger men and some Black men.
26. Rust Belt messaging connected trade, manufacturing, energy, masculinity and anti-elite resentment.
27. Sun Belt messaging linked border control, housing costs, service-sector anxiety and Latino working-class pressure.
28. Alternative media and influencer channels gave Trump access to voters who did not follow traditional politics.
29. Outside organizations and Super PACs extended reach into low-propensity voter pools.
30. Trump converted legal and institutional criticism into a persecution-and-resistance narrative for many supporters.

XII. Referendum Election or Party-System Realignment?

The correct answer is both. In the short term, 2024 was clearly a referendum on the Biden-Harris governing environment. Inflation, cost of living, immigration, border control and desire for change were central. AP VoteCast found that economic and immigration concerns were highly important to Trump voters, while Harris voters were more motivated by democracy and abortion. [3]

In the long term, the election also signaled party-system realignment. Democrats increasingly look like the party of college-educated, urban, suburban, secular and professional voters. Republicans increasingly look like the party of non-college, rural, exurban, male, culturally conservative and some multiracial working-class voters. Catalist's post-election analysis likewise emphasized Democratic weakness among younger voters, men, voters of color, low-propensity voters and urban voters compared with earlier Democratic coalitions. [6]

Strategic conclusion

2024 was the election in which Democrats tried to make the contest about values and institutions, while Republicans pulled it back to daily life: prices, border, order and resentment of elites. In elections, the message that voters feel every week often beats the message they agree with in principle.

XIII. Strategic Lessons for 2026 and 2028

For Democrats, the first task is economic reconstruction. The party cannot rely on democracy and abortion rights alone. It must explain, in plain language, how it will reduce rent, groceries, insurance, medical costs, child care and interest-rate pain. It must also rebuild credibility with men, non-college voters, Latino working-class voters, rural voters and low-propensity citizens without abandoning its core commitments.

For Republicans, the challenge is governing accountability. In 2024, grievance and dissatisfaction were assets. In 2026 and 2028, Republicans will be judged on whether they actually lower costs, restore border control, reduce disorder and manage the economy. Gains among Latino voters, young men and low-propensity working-class voters are not guaranteed permanent realignment; they must be converted into durable governing trust.

The deeper lesson is that future winning campaigns will need to combine cultural identity, economic credibility and media-ecosystem fluency. A party that has policy but no emotional language will underperform. A party that has emotion but no governing delivery will eventually face backlash.

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