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Why Harris Lost (It's Not Complicated)



Adam Schultz, *Official photograph of Vice-President Kamela Harris, 2021, Library of Congress (inverted)*

Contradictory explanations by Democratic office holders and pundits

Biden dropped out too late.

Harris was tapped too early.

Harris didn't introduce herself to voters.

She was too well-known.

Biden gave Harris impossible jobs to do.
He didn't give Harris anything important to do.
Biden should have resigned in support of Harris.
He never should have anointed Harris.
The economy was weak, but Harris said it was strong.
The economy was strong, but voters thought it was weak.
Trump voters are disconnected from the media.
Trump voters are addicted to the blogosphere
Trump is disinhibited.
Harris laughs too much.
Harris failed to court progressive voters.
She failed to move to the center.
Trump voters are racist and misogynist.
They are victims of the pandemic and inflation.

The real reasons Harris lost

She ignored progressive and working-class voters.

Harris' proposed [tax increases](#) on millionaires, billionaires, and large corporations were modest. She never mooted a wealth tax, stock trading tax, luxury tax or anything else that would have allowed significant money transfers to the American working-class, which comprises about 70% of voters. Even [Republican voters support](#) greater [tax fairness](#).

It was only on October 23, 2024, ten days before the election, that Harris announced her support for a national, 15-dollar minimum wage. 15 bucks is no longer a living wage, not even in rural areas with lower-than-average housing costs. In most large cities, [average hourly wages](#) are already higher than that, though still inadequate.

Harris's main campaign surrogates were rich, out of touch Democratic grandees like the Clintons and Obamas who condescended to working people. She took most of her economic advice from Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood.

She offered little help to the elderly or retired.

Trump promised to end taxation of Social Security income, Harris did not. Nor did she pledge to increase retirement benefits. Harris proposed adding benefits for dental care, eye care and at-home support for seniors. These promises, however, were not a major feature of Harris's stump speeches or interviews. She did not [support Medicare for all](#), an idea popular with 80% of Democrats and 60% of Independents.

What about parents with young children?

Harris's proposal to expand access to childcare by capping costs at 7% of income for "working families" was paltry and vague on details. She supported renewal of the child tax-credit which drastically cut child poverty, but that was not a central theme in her campaign.

Why didn't we hear more about the environment and climate change?

Harris made almost no mention of these issues in the campaign. Instead, she promised to support fracking (though she earlier opposed it) and enable the continued growth of oil drilling. [She boasted](#) (accurately) that under Biden/Harris, there had been "the largest increase in domestic oil production in history."

Indigenous communities turned against the Democrats.

Harris did not promise action to increase jobs, improve water quality, clean up pollution, or address the crisis in Native American health. Indigenous counties shifted 10% in [Trump's favor](#) compared to 2020.

And then there were Black and Latino men; what about them?

Though Black men voted overwhelmingly for Harris (78%), that was down 2% from 2020, and didn't match the 85% vote of women. Harris's failure to balance her support for law enforcement with criticism of police harassment and [violence](#), may have been a reason. Harris could have reminded Black voters that Trump supports the return of "[stop-and-frisk](#)", banned by a federal court in 2023. Latino men only supported Harris over Trump by 50 to 47 percent, much worse than 2020. Was that because she lined up with Trump in proposing to block most immigration from Latin America?

Union members in the upper Mid-West felt left out.

Harris said little about enhancing the right to form unions. She campaigned with union busting Republicans like [Liz Cheney](#) more than with UAW President Shawn Fain, the most influential and effective union leader in decades. Harris failed to win the support of the Teamsters Union and its president Sean O'Brian. During her meeting with him, she defended Biden's strong-arming of union members to avert rail and UPS strikes.

She ignored or insulted students and the young.

Harris said little about the cost of education, loan repayments or vocational training. She failed to listen to students demonstrating against Israel's assault on Palestinian civilians in Gaza, and in several cases, even [insulted them](#). They turned away from her in droves, especially in the key swing states: [Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin](#).

Other anti-war voters fared no better.

Not only did Harris fail to condemn the Israeli genocide in Gaza, she refused to talk about it with Arab-American and Muslim leaders. A Harris-supporting, Palestinian-American activist was denied even a brief speaking slot at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Harris's surrogate, Bill Clinton [insulted Arab-Americans](#) in Michigan, a key swing state. In addition to her blind support of Israel, Harris refused to press for an end to the war in Ukraine. It turns out Blacks, Latinos, students and the most everybody else [opposes U.S. funding of war](#) and genocide.

The factors above, distilled: inflation, inequality, and war

Inflation: The price rises of 2020-23, especially for food and [rent](#), have not reversed – not even close. And because rental costs were already high – often amounting to 50% of working-class income – the increase in salaries did not feel like adequate compensation. Though price gouging by [food wholesalers and retailers](#) and by [housing rental companies](#) was obvious, Biden did nothing to stop it. Harris's promise, early in her campaign, to stop price gouging (which she dropped after pressure from business interests), fell flat because the remedy was vague, unpersuasive and ultimately unheard.

Inequality: The real economic story of the last 50 years has been the steady rise of economic inequality. Scholars have charted the increase in detail, but the impact was exacerbated during the pandemic and after. The wealthy sought shelter in country houses and holiday resorts, or else had groceries and restaurant food delivered to their large homes and apartments. The poor did the cooking, the nursing, and made the deliveries. The Democrats were supposed to be the party of working people, and while Biden's economic investments helped the economy quickly recover from sharp, pandemic decline, it did not erase broad, working-class abjection. Harris needed to offer a populist message of economic uplift, even salvation. She offered nothing of the kind.

War: There's nothing like a war, or two wars, to make a national community feel threatened and insecure. The continuing war in Ukraine is idiotic and everybody knows it – each passing day weakens Ukraine's bargaining position, and that has been true since the initial, successful defense of Kiev. And yet it continues, with the very real threat of escalation, and even the use of nuclear weapons. The conflict in Gaza isn't a war so much as an ethnic cleansing, or even a genocide. Israel is not fighting an army – Palestine has none, only Hamas, a rag tag militia that has already been devastated. Israel is instead attacking a people and an idea of independence. Students and Arab-Americans in the U.S. are angry and ashamed about it. [Polls indicate](#) Black people and Latinos are too. Many have [mobilized](#) to protest a genocide.

Conclusion: If Harris had 1) offered a bold plan to lower prices, reduce housing costs, and address inequality and 2) taken the institutionally risky, but electorally popular strategy of breaking with Biden and promising a quick end to the wars, she would have won.

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