



ELECTION TAKEAWAYS

A Postmortem Report on the 2024 Elections and Ideas for the Future

In the wake of the disappointing election results, Democrats around the country have rightfully been asking questions and looking for answers. While the election margin was close, Democrats lost the White House and U.S. Senate and failed to flip the U.S. House. Nationally, Democrats lost ground with voters in nearly every state and demographic, though some Democratic candidates did much better than the top of the ticket in their states and districts.

In the days after the election, NewDEAL turned to our members – state and local elected officials around the nation – for on-the-ground insights outside of Washington, D.C. We asked them what they saw and heard that might explain Trump’s victory. We asked them what went wrong. We asked them what went right. We asked them about the path forward.

From new members of Congress to the mayor’s office in rural Western North Carolina, our members offered unique insight into the political environment in 2024 and how national Democrats lost such an important election. Among a diverse group of leaders with a wide range of perspectives, some common themes emerged.

WHAT WENT WRONG

The harsh reality is that there isn’t one clear reason we lost the presidency – there were many. But in our interviews, NewDEAL Leaders from across the country told us that voters felt that Democrats were out of touch with their everyday concerns. They pointed to the economy, specifically affordability, as well as cultural issues and immigration. They also talked about the changing media landscape and plague of disinformation, two key new realities in American politics.



“Here in New Hampshire, like other places in the country, we have a housing crisis. Childcare is unaffordable and unavailable. Energy costs are going up, and that’s the stuff that I think folks really care about and that we, frankly, probably weren’t talking enough about during the election.”

— **State Representative Matt Wilhelm, New Hampshire**



“If people are hurting, if it feels more expensive to live, then pointing at unemployment getting lower, pointing at inflation going down, does not matter if the person doesn’t feel that way, right? And so there were great economic messages and plans from the Harris administration. Her housing plans compared to the incoming president’s housing plans are night and day. They are the difference between a plan and the concept of a plan as I think the joke goes, right? But if people don’t feel that way, it doesn’t matter.”

— **State Treasurer Zach Conine, Nevada**



"I was surprised by the extent of the result. I was not surprised so much by the result. I think we all knew, especially here in Georgia, it was going to be a razor-thin, 50/50, race. You have a sitting incumbent [Republican] governor who, for all intents and purposes, if you look at the polling data, is pretty popular, and the economy is front and center and inflation and just price pressure, gas pumps, grocery receipts, it's tough. It's tough. Those kitchen table, bread and butter issues are going to factor into the decision making of Georgians. And I was hearing it."

— **State Representative Phil Olaleye, Georgia**



"If all you're told is that the Democrats are the party of woke and the Democrats are the ones who care about they/them and not you, which was a very effective ad in Pennsylvania, then it doesn't matter what Joe Biden is doing with the economy. It doesn't matter that your best friend's business got a rescue plan grant that saved it from closing. It doesn't matter that the park down the street from you is redone. It doesn't matter that you now have a bridge in your town that's not going to collapse. It doesn't matter because the culture piece and that filter through which so many people view the Democratic Party has tainted your view of the Democratic brand, and you're going to vote against that."

— **Mayor Paige Cagnetti, Scranton, Pennsylvania**



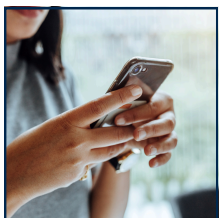
"We have abandoned the safety, security and economic message, and we have let the far left dominate the brand and reputation of the Democratic Party. Now, I think when you look at the actual policies that we've implemented – that the president has implemented – they were generally focused on safety, security and the economic well-being of the middle class and working people. That just didn't translate, though, because it was so overwhelmed by the cultural war issues, with the exception, I think, of immigration. And if I had a time machine and could go back in time, I would have implored the Biden Administration out of the jump in 2021 to deal with immigration in the same way that they had the bipartisan bill at the end. They let, I think, the left commandeer that space. And because of that, we never got a comprehensive, tough immigration bill passed, and that, I think, was one of the albatrosses around our neck heading into this election. The bottom line is this: The Democratic Party needs a strong dose of radical pragmatism. We need to listen to people and understand their primary concerns will always be their safety and their bank account."

— **City Attorney Zach Klein, Columbus, Ohio**



"Immigration is a big issue for a lot of people. Like you saw Hispanic community members come out in Texas as well, voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump because of the border issues, right? Because Texas is a border state. The state has spent billions of dollars in putting the state guard down on the border, has spent a lot of money on the barbed wires in the water, which probably doesn't help anybody or deter anybody anyways, but so I think that rhetoric is very powerful in the state of Texas especially, and then probably a lot of other states as well."

— **State Representative Salman Bhojani, Texas**



"We are not messaging properly and in the right places and that we need to focus on the people we serve. My boys are 26 and 23. They don't get the news like I get the news. They're on all these places that I am not, like Twitch and YouTube. What they see in the world is very different from what you see if you are not on those platforms and very different from what they may otherwise experience in their everyday lives. But that is their reality and I don't

think we communicate effectively on those platforms.”

— **State Representative Christine Hunschofsky, Florida**



“I think media consumption habits, because they're so fragmented, really vary, probably from state to state and district to district. We kind of polarize ourselves even in the neighborhoods where we live. You can't communicate to all these neighborhoods in the same way.”

— **State Senator Jay Chaudhuri, North Carolina**

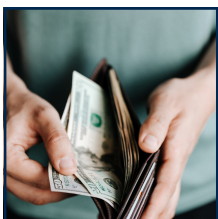


“We had to face down a rescue and recovery of a 21st century storm [Hurricane Helene] with 20th Century technology. I mean literally. We were passing notes to police officers and checking on people... It opened up a window where misinformation came flooding in. People said FEMA wasn't here. This was not happening. Not true. I mean, I shook FEMA people's hands the very next morning doing search and rescue and said thank you for being here. But if you listen to what was said, they're nowhere to be found. But that window, I think, really opened up the misinformation opportunity for it to seep in from all sides. And people in the middle who are dealing with it can't communicate. So how can you tell people, hey, FEMA is here, state resources, your church resources are here, shelters are open? If you can't communicate that out, you might as well not even exist.”

— **Mayor Zeb Smathers, Canton, North Carolina**

WHAT WENT RIGHT

Despite losing the presidency, some Democrats, including NewDEAL Leaders, outperformed the top of the ticket in many swing states and districts. NewDEAL Alum Josh Stein was elected Governor in North Carolina and NewDEAL Alum Ruben Gallego won for U.S. Senate in Arizona. NewDEAL Leaders Kristen McDonald Rivet (MI-08) and Janelle Bynum (OR-05) were among those who outperformed in key U.S. House districts. Additionally, at the state legislative level, Democrats picked up seats in Montana, Wisconsin and North Carolina. It's clear that Democrats must make room for a big tent among their candidates, listening to people who won their states and districts and making room for people who don't “check the box” on every issue. Democrats would be wise to learn from these races; we spoke with Shane Wolfe, campaign manager for Kristen McDonald Rivet and other leaders who have won in difficult environments about their experiences.



“Every race is different. It's hard to universally apply learnings from one district, one contrast to another. But what worked for us was having Kristen speak for herself often. We were up on TV since June, and we never came down... Kristen was direct-to-camera... and voters were hearing directly from her, as opposed to studio spots that all sound like each other and seem funny. Kristen is authentic in who she is and comfortable in her skin, and she presented her case in a direct and personal manner, and I think that was effective. And then the other thing that was effective was inoculating on safety and presenting a positive economic vision and economic contrast with our opponent, so that voters knew that in our election they could trust Kristen on the economy more than her opponent and on getting money in their pockets and jobs in their communities more than her opponent. I mean, that's what we did well, and it's why we were successful.”

— **Shane Wolfe, managed the winning congressional campaign of Kristen McDonald Rivet in Michigan**



“[Senator-elect Gallego] made it one of his biggest strengths going into our rural communities. Most of the time, people focus on Maricopa alone to get all their votes and secure their win. But he traveled to small towns and held rallies. He was probably the most authentic campaigner out there. He had a rodeo. You know, never, never have I ever been to an event that was a rodeo. I mean, a full rodeo. And it was a Latino rodeo. That place was packed. We had an amazing time.

We [also] have a lot of work with the Latino community to get back to the basics in regards to what they want to see changed. They want a plan of action... Having the right strategy in regards to how we unite Latinos to see that the Democratic values and leaders will make their lives better. That they have a better paying job. That they have insurance. That they can afford the rent and the prescriptions that they need — the healthcare is so important. And tackle issues on immigration. Really come out and have a plan of like, ‘how do we tackle this?’”

— **Corporation Commissioner Anna Tovar, Arizona**



“Republicans in our district tried to throw everything. First of all, we were swimming upstream in a district that Trump won by two points. So like that was our sea level. And then you have a Republican establishment and trust fund opponent who had enough money to try to paint Kristen, and they threw every attack on the books at her. Immigration, China, the transgender attacks. I think it's fair to say that it didn't stick because of Kristen's roots, like people here know her and they know that that stuff is phony baloney and and also because of the image that we presented while we were campaigning of a commonsense problem solver from your community who's fighting for the things that matter for you — tax cuts for working families, lower prescription drug costs, more jobs and safe communities.”

— **Shane Wolfe**



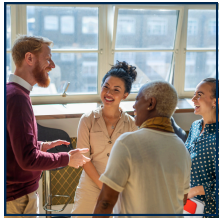
“A lot of our success in getting our candidates to hold on and prevent a Republican supermajority was based on our candidates getting out there and knocking doors and having a presence — not just during campaign season, but being out there in the community, so they had more of a relationship with their constituents than just asking for their vote come election time. You know, just relational over transactional.”

— **State Representative Matt Wilhelm, New Hampshire**



“I don't ever forget when push comes to shove that I ultimately answer to my constituents. They're the people who elect me to do this job. And I think sometimes it's easy to get distracted from that, especially in the midst of a national campaign. I think we lose close races when the candidates get involved with ballot measures, like the marijuana amendment, or the presidential campaign. We need to win over people who aren't always with us, and our candidates winning your close races will help the other races anyway. If you forget that and lose sight of who you work for, then voters come back with, ‘I don't trust you. I don't know you, and you don't really care what I'm dealing with because you are focusing on issues that aren't my issues and races that aren't the one you want to earn to represent me.’”

— **State Representative Christine Hunschofsky, Florida**



“I had a bunch of Republican supporters when I ran. And you know, generally, they're okay with the candidate who is the better candidate, more than they are fixated on party. At least when it comes to the state. Presidential candidates don't have those kinds of relationships on the ground in every state. The country is too big, and so we didn't have a mayor of a ruby red town endorsing President Harris, right? You didn't have people who have seen Senator Rosen for six or seven years at random pancake breakfasts and random small towns having actual conversations, following up on items, you know, just being known as a human being.”

— **State Treasurer Zach Conine, Nevada**

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

The road back for Democrats will require asking and answering hard questions. We asked NewDEAL Leaders to give us their thoughts on the path ahead. Their thoughtful answers included doing a lot more listening, telling voters what we stand for and not just against, and keeping up the work on an agenda that advances economic progress over the next four years, while picking the right spots to call out what Republicans are doing. They also talked about the importance of state and local leaders in the years ahead.



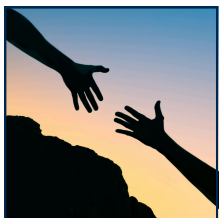
“The ability to listen and hear people out is the first step. If you don't do that, you inherently are disrespecting them and pushing them farther away. You're not going to agree about everything, but finding the things you can have conversations around is so important and that's what I try to do. I think many around here do the same thing, even on the Republican side. I've seen Republicans talk to Democrats. It's a matter of listening. It's a matter of showing respect, understanding what they're going through, and not talking down to. I think a lot of it boils down to respect, because it goes both ways. But how can you ask someone to vote and put that sacred responsibility in your hands to your name, if you're not showing them that you respect them?”

— **Mayor Zeb Smathers, Canton, North Carolina**



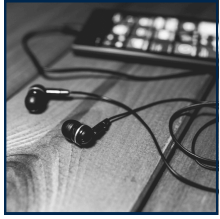
“Listen. Get on the ground and talk to people in your district. Talk to people across the state. And really come in with a level of humility to know what you don't know.... Now is the time to work more closely and enlist local electeds from the municipal level on up to be part of that work of listening to understand. To now, hopefully, bubble up the things that matter most and the language and the frames to use when messaging and communicating to specific populations because they've given you all of that. We're not having to make it up. We're actually pulling it from the people themselves.”

— **State Representative Phil Olaleye, Georgia**



“I think people are upset. I think we all need time to process, to grieve, where appropriate, to thank folks who aren't going to be in office anymore for doing the work right. And then I think we need to look for opportunities to lead. We need to look for opportunities to help. And sometimes that will be in a resistance setting, and sometimes it won't. And I think we have to be really intentional about which one we do and in which place. And that's gonna be different in different places. It's gonna be different for different people. It's gonna be different in different communities, in different states and whatever. But I think broadly, one of our biggest takeaways at this stage is that you can't just stop the work.”

— **State Treasurer Zach Conine, Nevada**



“I think we are going to have to really do a deep dive on what our media landscape looks like. I think we've seen a lot of young white men, who are avid listeners of these right-wing podcasts. We need to figure out what our answer to that is, and how we can meet people where they are in their cars and in their AirPods as they're working out.”

— **State Representative Matt Wilhelm, New Hampshire**



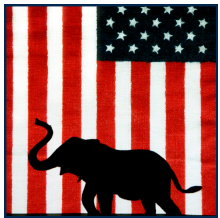
“I don't think that the national party has moved too far left. I think that there are some in the national party that have taken positions that are out of step. I think that those positions are then blown up by a right wing ecosystem so as to try to caricature our party in a way that isn't actually representative of the vast majority of elected officials. And I think that we need to do a better job of grounding what we talk about in the common sense ideas that we have that are centered around people. So the perception of what the Democratic Party is has certainly gotten away from us. What the Democratic Party is, I think, is focused on people and uplifting people and the issues that people care about. I do think that we have better ideas on these things. I don't know that the voters get that. And it's our job to fix that disparity.”

— **Shane Wolfe**



“I think the question about wokeness is an interesting one. You know, I do think it's not one necessarily of our making, but we find ourselves grappling with it for sure. I'm looking forward to figuring out how we can stay true to our values, while also talking about it in a way that really lifts everybody up.”

— **State Representative Matt Wilhelm, New Hampshire**



“Folks that come out to vote, really come out to vote for Donald Trump. I would argue it's more about Donald Trump and not Trumpism and I think the country's getting ready to experience Trumpism. And I think that they will overreach. And I think he will push for change faster than the public is ready to absorb, and I think we'll see that backlash again. What I worry about is that Democrats don't learn anything in the process, and that we again kind of become, you know, the party that's the coalition against Trump.”

— **State Senator Jay Chaudhuri, North Carolina**



“Listen to mayors more. Listen to folks like me when I say, as I did at a Democratic mayor's meeting with the campaign in May, please do not talk about student loan debt in Northeastern Pennsylvania, that is a killing argument for Democrats. Listening to the people who win elections on the ground is really important, and usually our local voices get drowned out.”

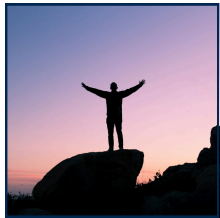
— **Mayor Paige Cognito, Scranton, PA**



“To me, the best laboratory for pursuing kind of common sense middle ground policies is going to be at the state level through our governors and so, I mean, when I think about the future of the leadership of our party, and you know what works? Governors are folks that do not spend their time in Washington, D.C. They're not in echo chambers. They're dealing with everyday issues of people. I also think this would be my argument with state legislatures and

governors. I mean, we deal with early warning signs of issues, whether it's the transgender issues, critical race theory that's tied to wokeness. All of these issues that we saw the Trump folks run as a national playbook were things that have been tried in state legislatures before. And I just think that governors have been better equipped in addressing and being prepared to deal with those issues than someone who has served as a U.S. Senator.”

— **State Senator Jay Chaudhuri, North Carolina**

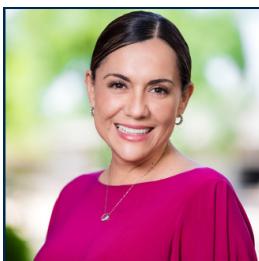


Let's not forget because we lost that we still have accomplishments to sell and build on with people. The people that are alive because of the work that was done during the pandemic are still alive because of that work. The people who have access to health care that didn't have access to health care before the Affordable Care Act still have access to healthcare. The good work doesn't immediately vanish because we lost an election.”

— **State Treasurer Zach Conine, Nevada**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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AZ Corporation
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FL Representative
Christine Hunschofsky



GA Representative
Phil Olaleye



MI Congresswoman-elect
Kristen McDonald Rivet



NC Senator Jay
Chaudhuri



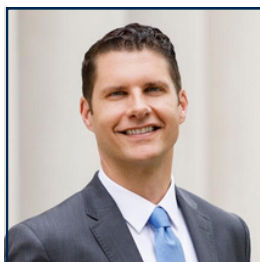
Canton, NC, Mayor
Zeb Smathers



NV State Treasurer
Zach Conine



NH Representative
Matt Wilhelm



Columbus, OH, City
Attorney Zach Klein



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