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2024 Post-Election Report

A retrospective and longitudinal data analysis on why Trump beat Harris.



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On November 5, former President Donald Trump defeated Vice President Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election after more than 150 million Americans voted, a slightly lower turnout rate than in 2020.

Data for Progress polling has [consistently shown](#) that the top issues for voters in this election were inflation and the cost of living. While the inflation rate has cooled over the last three years after spiking following the height of the COVID pandemic, the higher cost of living has angered voters, as it has in other affluent countries around the globe. The U.S. election result adds to a [clear trend](#) of both left and right incumbent parties being punished by voters for post-pandemic inflation.

While most analysts acknowledge the role of inflation, others point to [President Joe Biden's age](#) and decision to stay in the race through mid-July, voters' perception of Harris as insufficiently populist on [economic issues](#) or out-of-touch on [social issues](#), and Democrats' failure to use [non-traditional media](#) to connect with [politically disengaged voters](#) as additional explanations for Trump's victory.

To help explain and contextualize the 2024 election results, and the merits of these explanations of Trump's victory, Data for Progress analyzed data from dozens of national surveys of likely voters conducted over the last year.

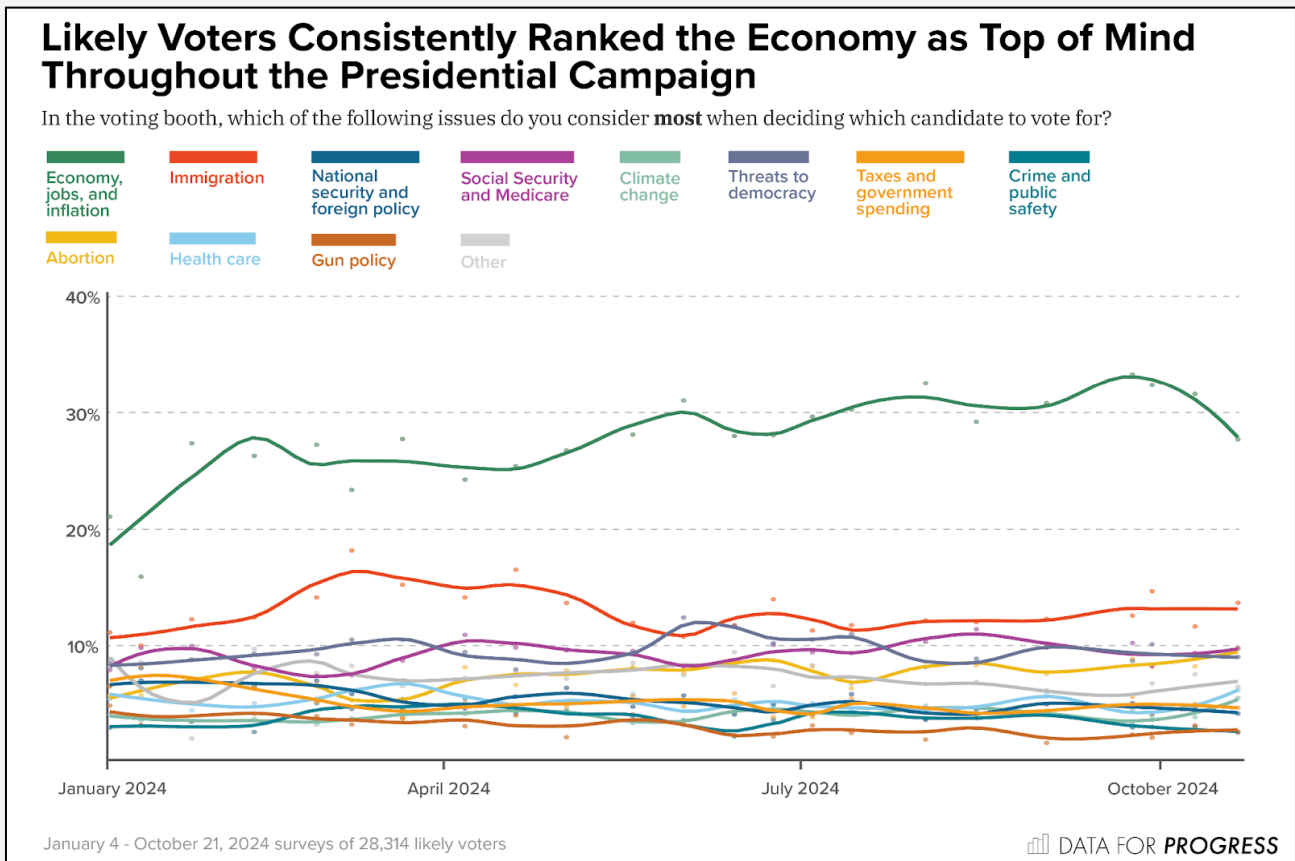
Key Takeaways

- Before Biden exited the race, voters were highly concerned about his age, and swing voters overwhelmingly cited it as the main reason they wouldn't vote for Biden.
- Voters were also deeply unsatisfied with Biden's economy. A strong majority perceived the economy as getting worse for people like them, with more than 3 in 4 consistently reporting they were paying more for groceries. Voters blamed Biden more than any other person or group for U.S. economic conditions.
- While voters across party lines strongly supported Biden's populist economic policies, many were not aware that his administration had enacted them.
- When Harris entered the race, her favorability surged, along with Democrats' and Independents' enthusiasm for voting in the election.
- On the economy — voters' top issue — Harris struggled to escape Biden's legacy. Half of voters said that Harris would mostly continue the same policies as Biden, leading swing state voters to prefer Trump on handling inflation.
- Harris was effective at communicating to voters that she supported increasing taxes on billionaires, but struggled to break through with other aspects of her popular economic agenda. Most voters heard only "a little" or "nothing at all" about her plans to crack down on corporate price gouging, protect Social Security and Medicare, and lower the price of groceries, prescription drugs, and child care.
- Voters were unsure whether Harris or Trump had a clearer vision, and were split on which candidate could better manage the government.
- Beyond the economy, voters trusted Trump more than Biden and Harris on immigration, foreign policy, and changing the status quo.
- The Harris campaign effectively increased the percentage of voters who believed that Trump would attempt to pass a national abortion ban. However, voters consistently ranked the economy as a higher concern.
- Voters also reported high levels of concern about the Project 2025 agenda. However, many did not believe that Trump was associated with Project 2025.
- While Harris held an advantage with voters who regularly consume political news, those who consume little or no political news — a group that disproportionately consumes content on social media — supported Harris at much lower rates.

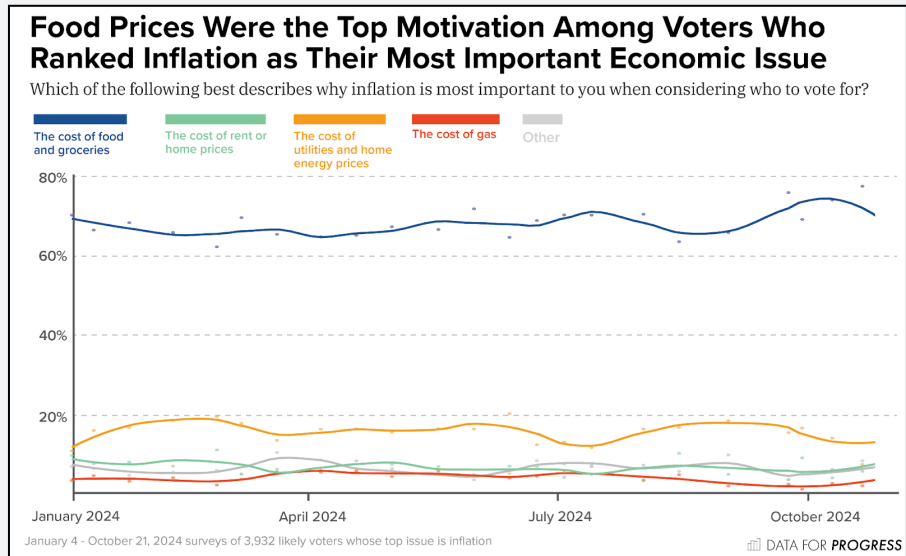
Inflation, Biden, and the Switch

The Biden administration has been dogged by public backlash to the spike in inflation following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the rising costs of groceries and housing. This follows a global trend [harming incumbents](#) on both sides of the political spectrum, and it came to a head in the 2024 election.

Throughout the year, whenever Data for Progress asked voters for their most important issue when deciding whom to vote for, the “[economy, jobs, and inflation](#)” consistently ranked No. 1 across demographics. Following the economy, voters selected “immigration,” “abortion,” and “threats to democracy” as their top issues — but the [economy](#) consistently ranked at least 15 points higher than these other issues.

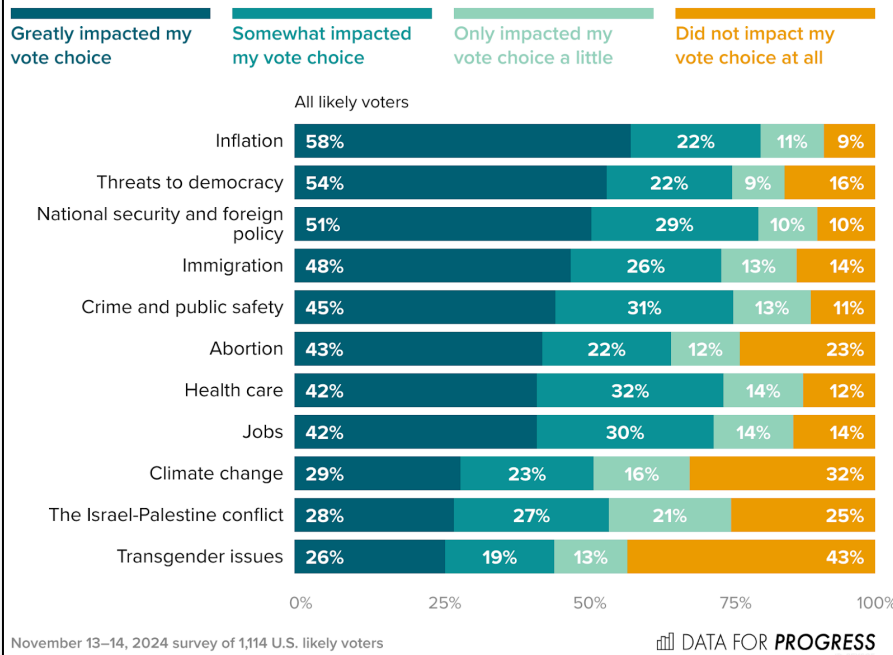


When likely voters who ranked “economy, jobs, and inflation” as their top issue were asked which factors contributed to their concern, a majority said they were most concerned about inflation. Those concerned about inflation specifically pointed to the cost of food and groceries, followed distantly by the cost of rent or home prices.



Voters Say Inflation Had the Greatest Impact on Their Choice in 2024

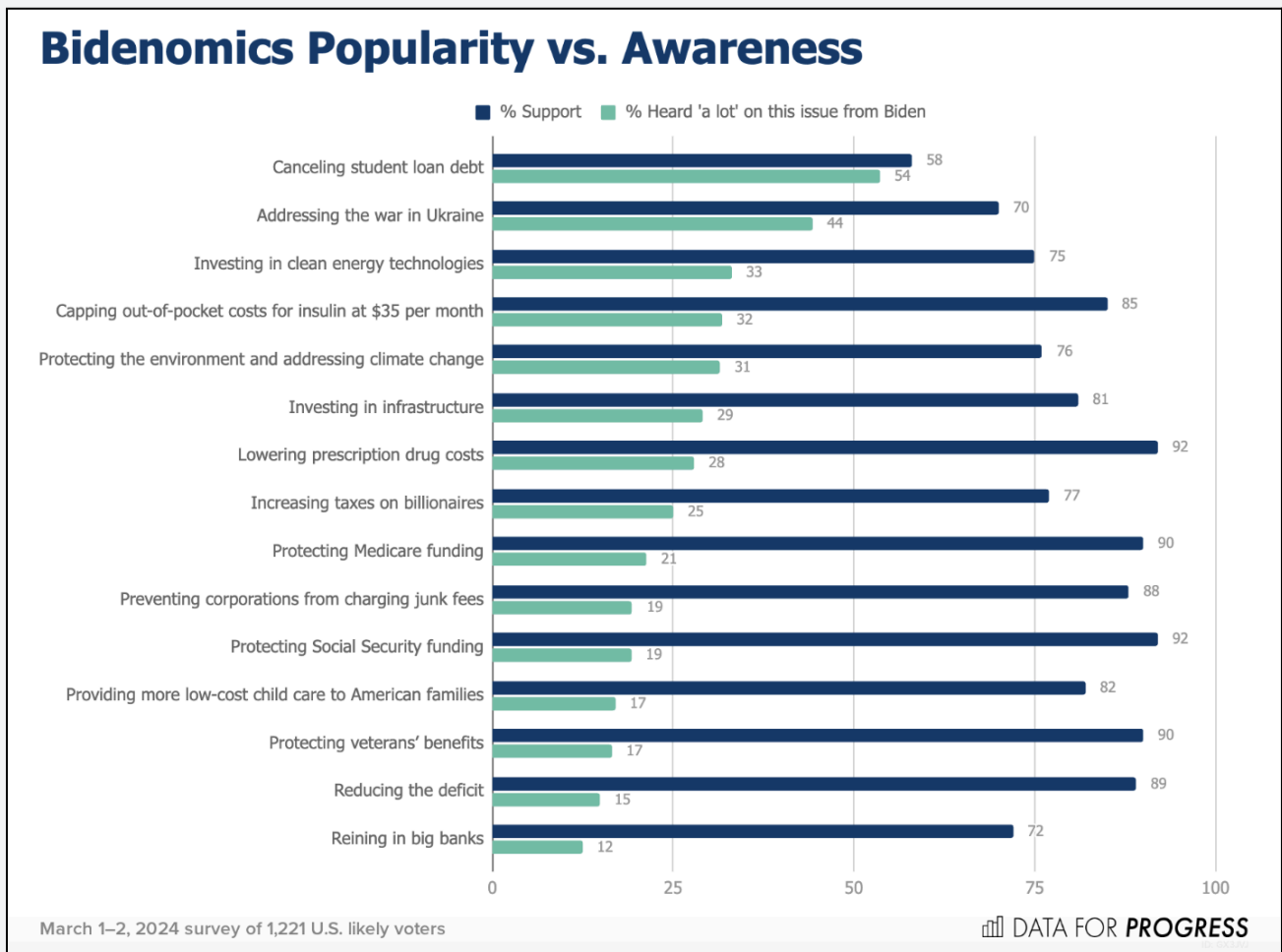
For each of the following, how much or how little did it impact who you voted for in the 2024 presidential election?



In a post-election [survey](#), Data for Progress tested a more specific list of issues based on mainstream media coverage and online discourse around the election results. When asked how these different issues impacted whom they voted for in the 2024 election, voters say that inflation had the greatest impact, followed by threats to democracy, and then national security and foreign policy. “Transgender issues” ranks last — and it’s the only issue tested where a majority of voters (56%) say it impacted their 2024 vote choice only a little or not at all.

There was also a large gap between voters' desire to see improvements in their economic conditions and their low level of knowledge of the actions that Biden had taken as president. Data for Progress consistently found that voters did not hear enough from Biden about what his administration was doing to address these top concerns.

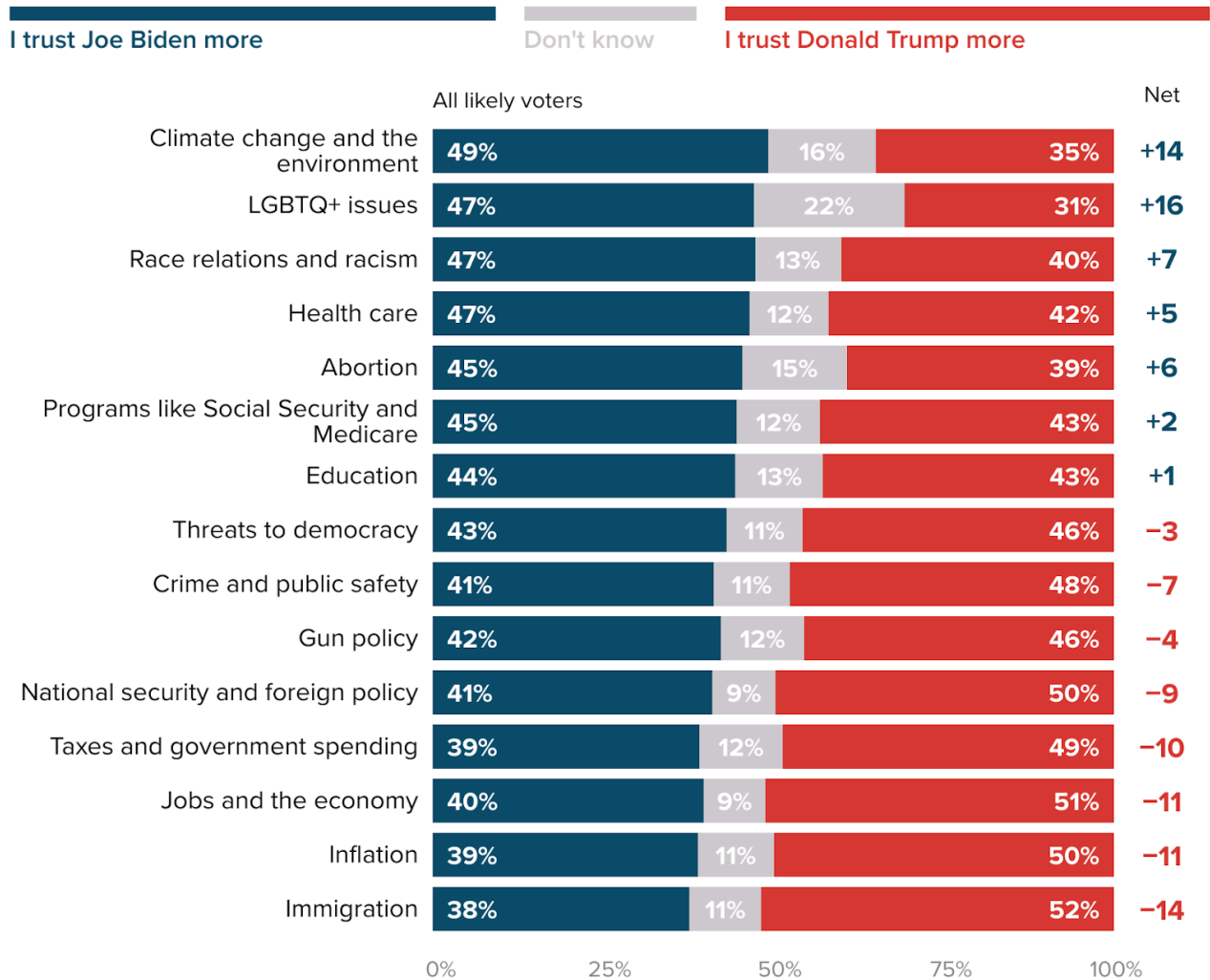
Ahead of Biden's last State of the Union address in March, Data for Progress [found](#) that the components of the "Bidenomics" agenda were overwhelmingly popular. Still, there remained significant gaps between voters' support for these policies and their awareness of Biden's actions on them.



To make matters worse, Trump had a double-digit trust advantage over Biden at the time on voters' top issues, including inflation (+11 trust advantage) and jobs and the economy (+11 trust advantage).

In March, Biden Held Largest Trust Advantage on Climate, Trump on Immigration

Who do you trust more — Joe Biden or Donald Trump — to handle each of the following issues?



March 1–2, 2024 survey of 1,221 U.S. likely voters

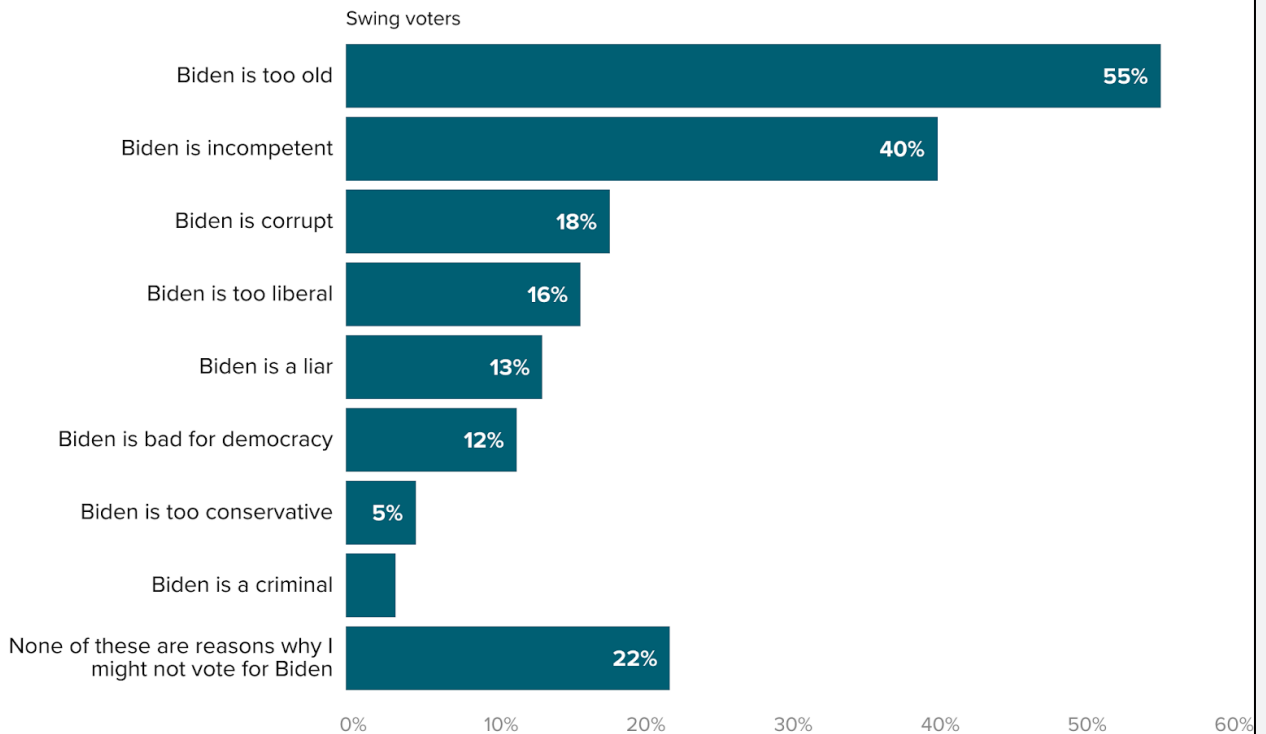
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Despite Biden’s “feisty” State of the Union performance, which was widely considered a success, Trump [consistently led](#) Biden in national polls ahead of the first presidential debate. While Data for Progress polling identified red flags for Trump, including how most voters saw Trump as a [greater threat to democracy](#), [approved of his guilty verdict in New York](#), and were [widely concerned about abortion restrictions](#) — inflation was still top of mind for voters, Biden’s approval rating was [underwater](#), and voters were very concerned about Biden’s age.

In Data for Progress’ [inaugural report on 2024 swing voters](#), compiled before Biden dropped out of the race, swing voters’ main concerns about Biden were his age and ability to handle the job — not his ideology. Swing voters selected Biden being too old (55%) and incompetent (40%) as reasons they might not vote for him, while only 16% selected “Biden is too liberal.”

Swing Voters Mainly Cited Age and Incompetence as Reasons They Might Not Vote for Biden

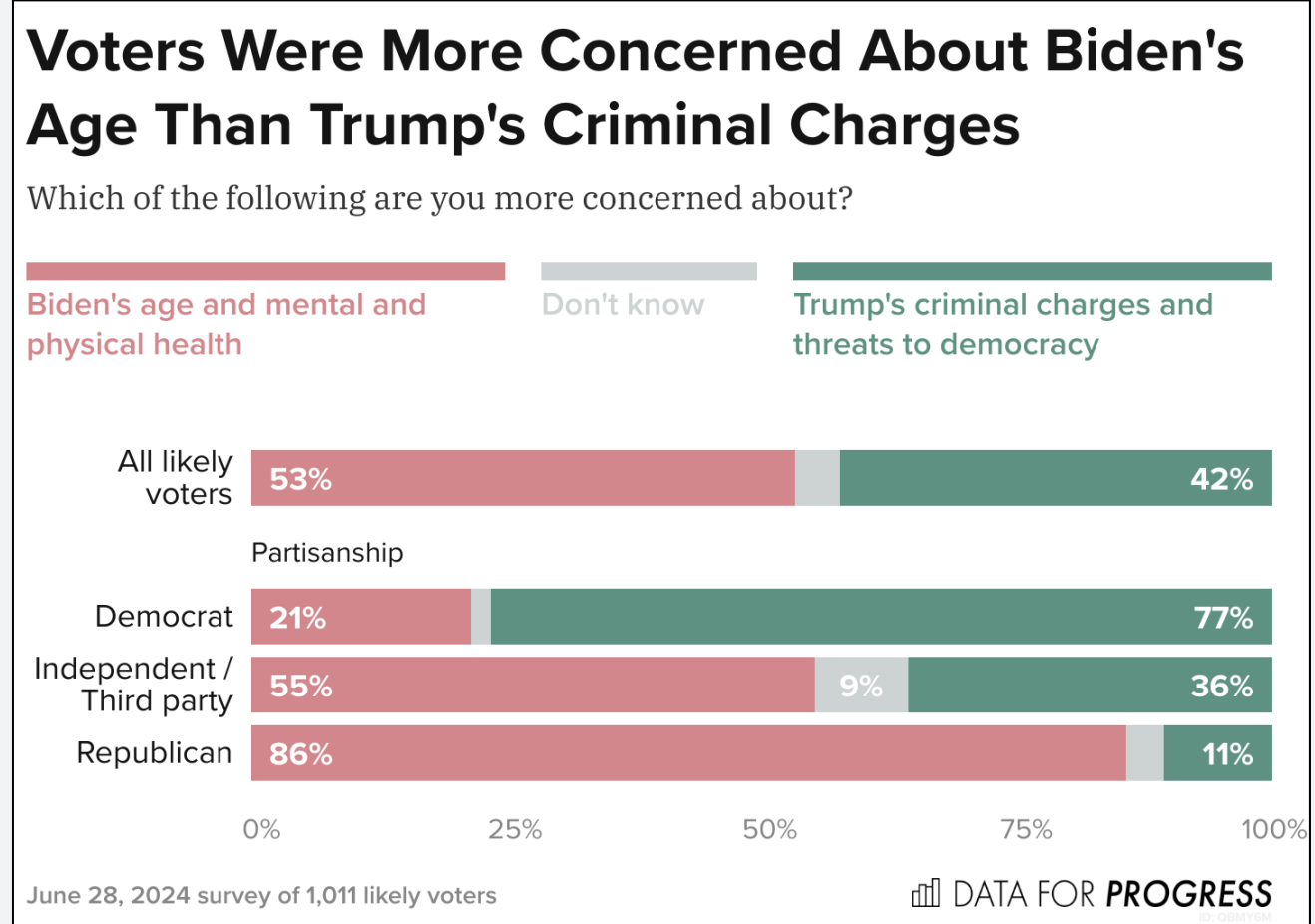
From the following options, are any of these reasons that you **might not** vote for Joe Biden in the upcoming 2024 presidential election? You may select up to three options.



April 19–May 4, 2024 surveys with 690 respondent interviews of U.S. swing voters

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The first presidential debate — and final one between Biden and Trump — reignited concerns about Biden’s age across the electorate and media. In a [post-debate flash poll](#), Data for Progress found that not only did a strong majority of voters think Biden was too old to be president, but also that more voters were concerned about Biden’s age and physical and mental health than they were about Trump’s criminal charges and threats to democracy.



The same poll found that voters thought Harris was more fit than Biden to run the country, and that if he dropped out, she should be the replacement nominee. On July 21, 24 days after the debate, Biden withdrew from the presidential race and endorsed Harris.

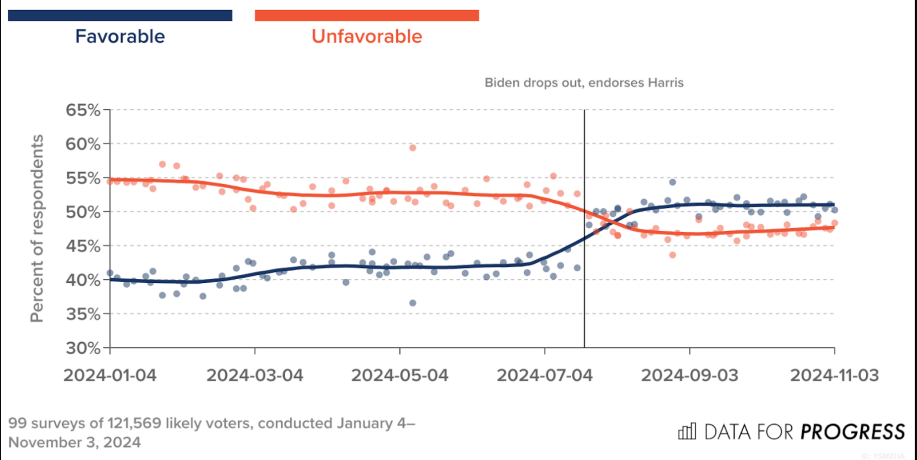
Harris Was Better Than Biden, but She Couldn't Escape His Legacy

Despite Harris' eventual loss, several data points indicate that she gave Democrats a better shot against Trump than Biden. From Biden's last day in the race to Election Day, the *New York Times*' polling average shows that Harris improved on Biden's performance by [4 to 7 points](#) in every swing state.

After Biden dropped out, Data for Progress' [polling](#) demonstrated a surge in favorability for Harris. Right after the Biden-Trump debate, Harris had a negative net favorability rating (-7). In Data for Progress' final pre-election national survey, Harris' net favorability was +1 — a +8-point swing. Since the beginning of 2024, Harris' net favorability had increased by +14 points.

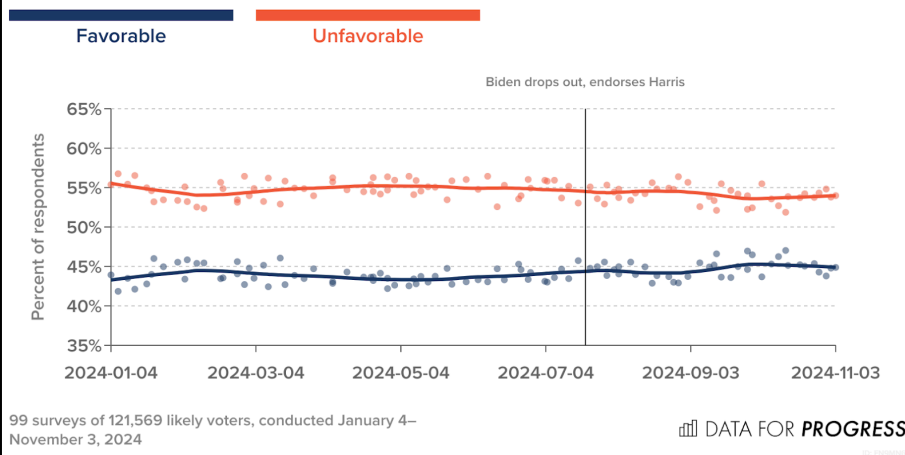
Kamala Harris' Favorability Surged After She Became the Presumptive Democratic Nominee

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following people or institutions?
— Kamala Harris



Donald Trump's Favorability Stayed Consistent Throughout the Year

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following people or institutions?
— Donald Trump

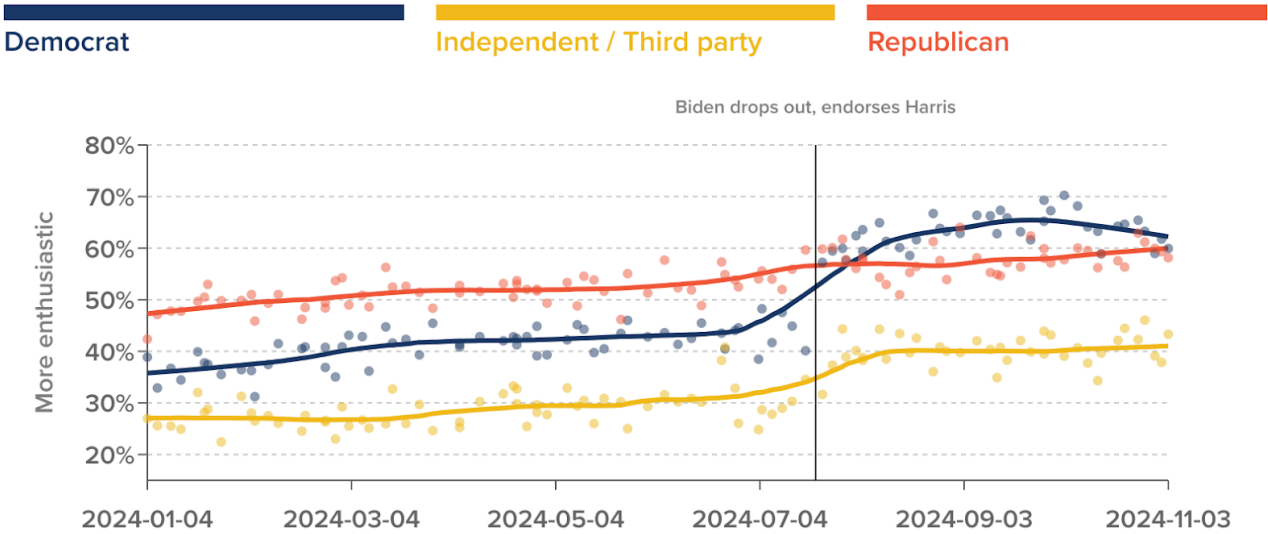


Meanwhile, Trump's net favorability stayed relatively the same, from -11 in June post-debate with Biden to -10 in the days before the election.

[Voter enthusiasm](#), particularly among Democrats and Independents, also surged after Harris became the presumptive Democratic nominee. Before Biden dropped out, an average of 41% of Democrats, 28% of Independents who lean toward Democrats, and 20% of Independents who don't lean toward either party said they were more enthusiastic about voting in 2024 than usual. After Biden's exit, these numbers rose to an average of 63%, 50%, and 27%, respectively, and largely remained at that level through Election Day.

Voter Enthusiasm Surged After Kamala Harris Became the Presumptive Democratic Nominee

Compared to previous elections, are you more enthusiastic about voting in 2024 than usual, or less enthusiastic?



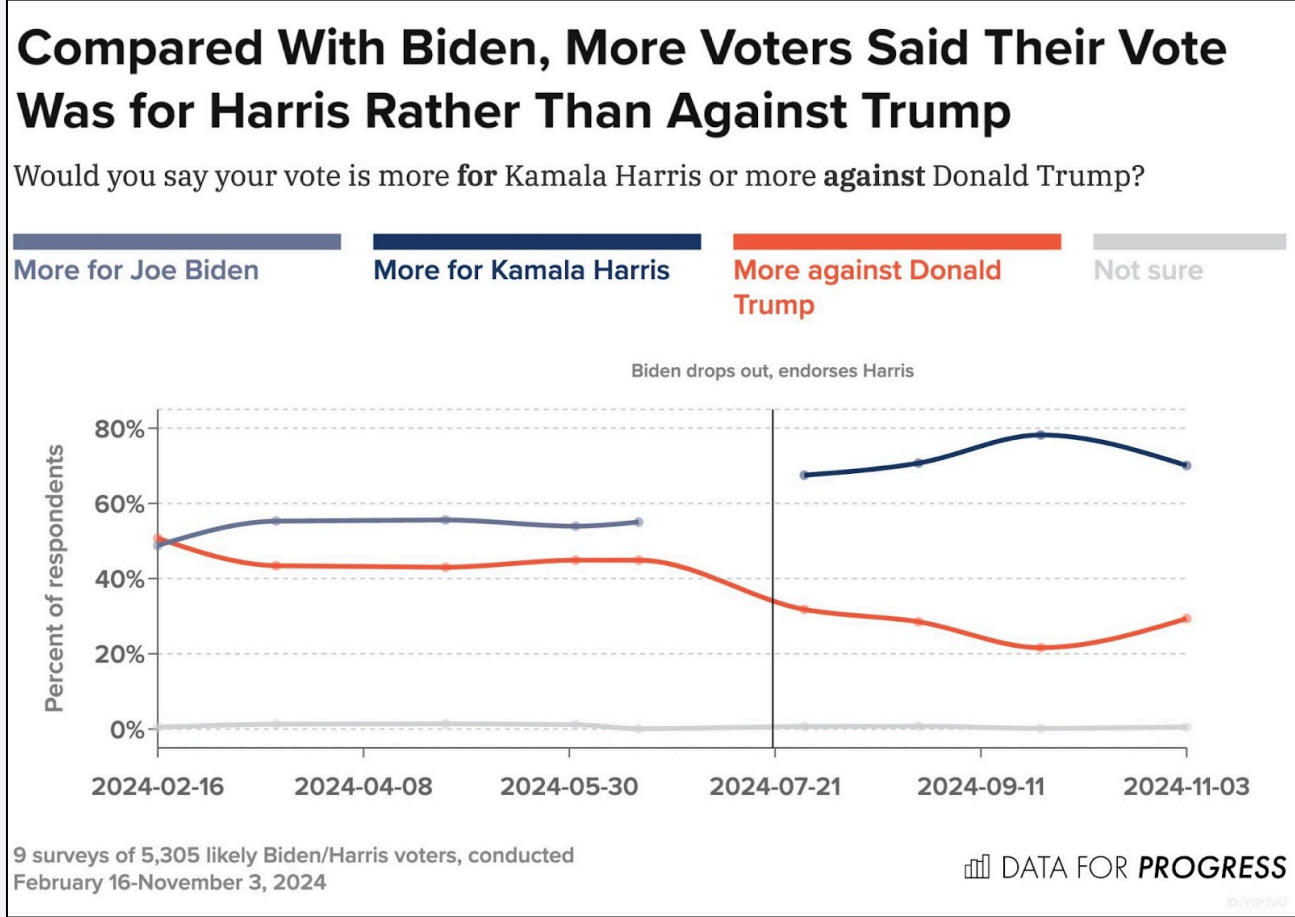
99 surveys of 121,569 likely voters, conducted January 4–November 3, 2024

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Another preliminary sign of a shift in voter enthusiasm was the [significant increase](#) in the percentage of voters who said they were voting *for Harris* rather than *against Trump*. This was a marked shift from how voters were considering their vote toward Biden.

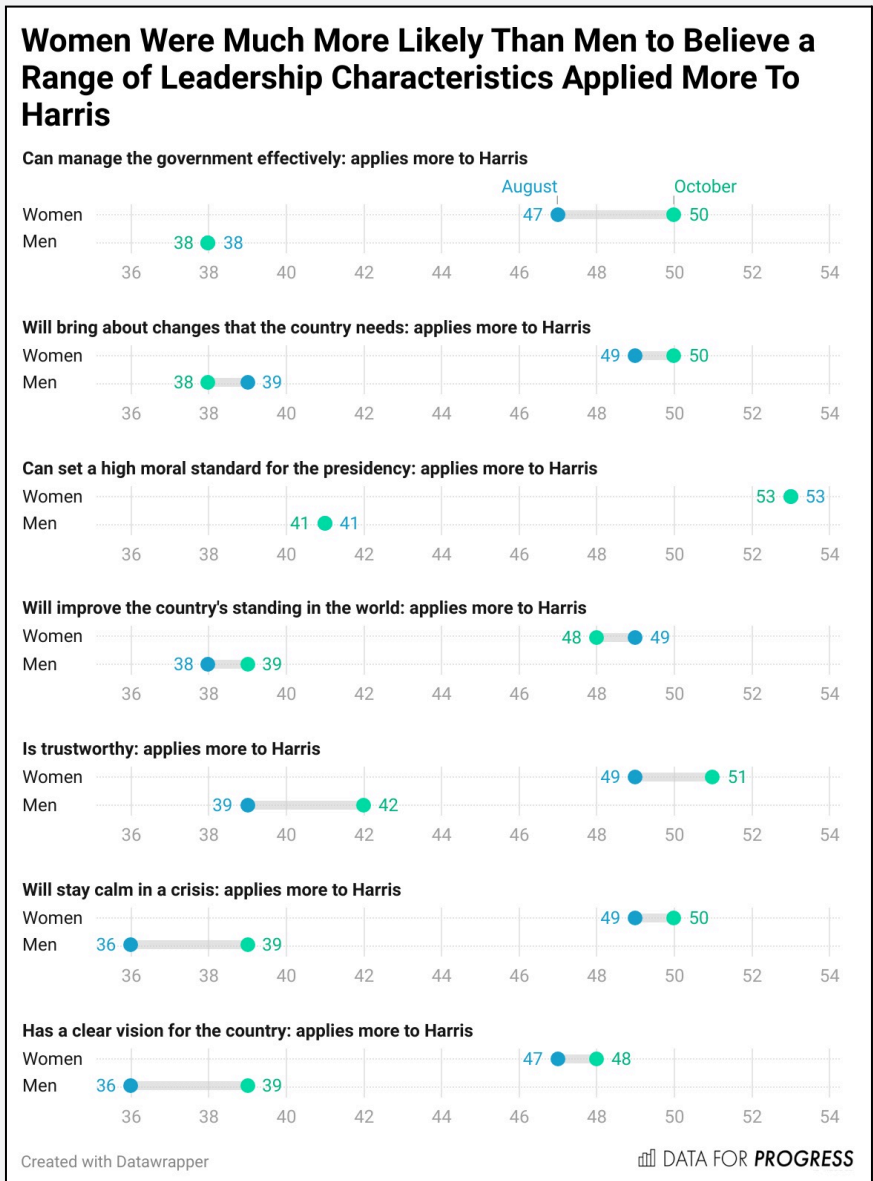
In mid-June, 57% of Biden 2020 voters said their vote was more *for* him, while 43% said it was more *against* Trump. After Harris became the presumptive nominee in July, between 68% and 78% of Biden 2020 voters indicated they were voting *for* her, while only about 27% on average said they were voting *against* Trump.



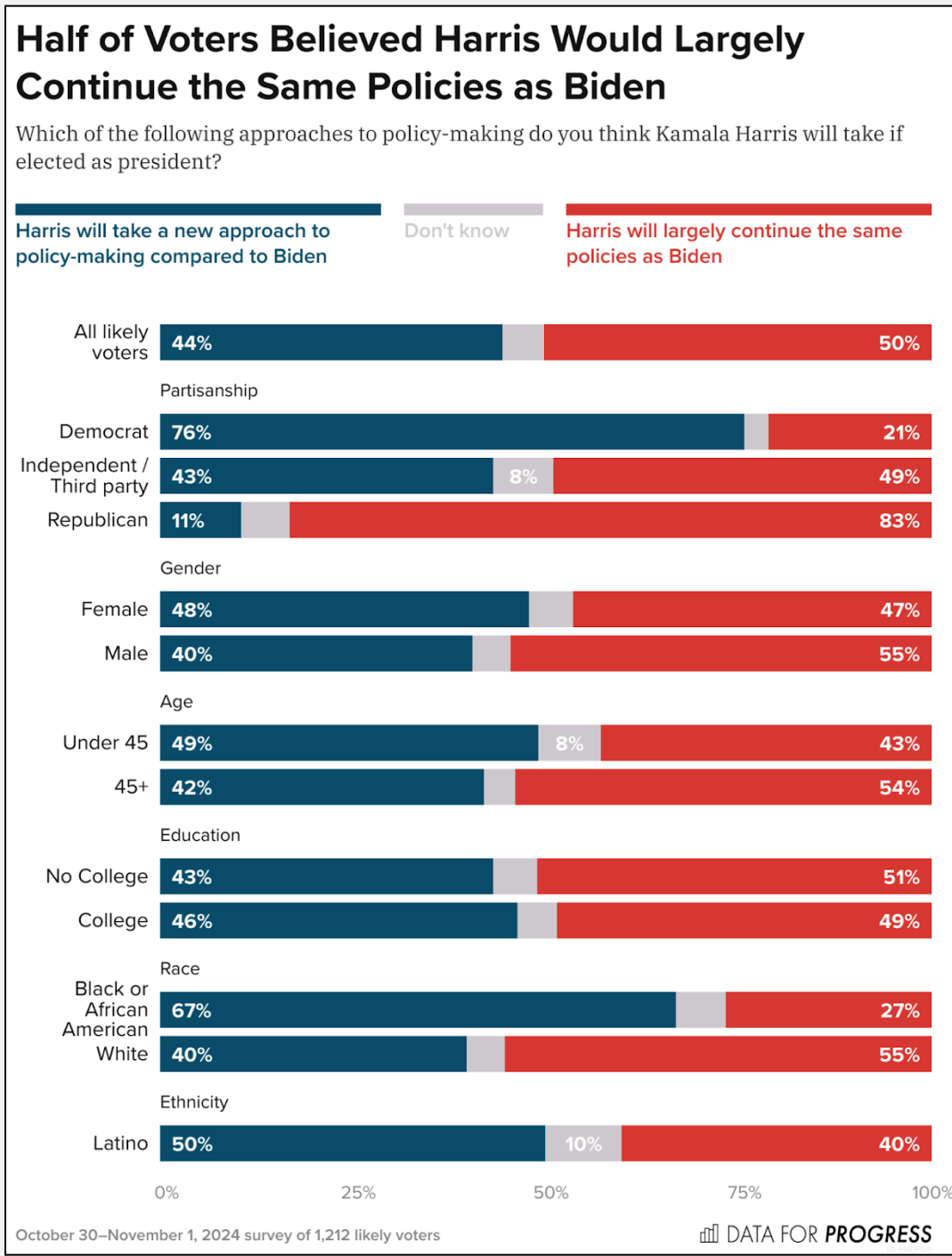
Voters also perceived Harris as a better candidate compared to Biden. In late April, for example, less than half of Biden voters (41%) [said](#) they were voting for him because they thought he was a good candidate. In contrast, once Harris became the nominee, an August survey showed that 71% of people planning to vote for Harris said that they thought she was a good candidate.

This shift was consistent across demographic groups. For example, June data showed that among voters backing Biden, 51% of Black voters and 33% of Latino voters believed he was a good candidate. By contrast, in July, 79% of Black voters and 75% of Latino voters supporting Harris believed she was a good candidate.

Over the course of Harris' campaign, voters' perceptions of her as a leader improved, but there was a notable gender gap. [Past research](#) shows that [perceptions](#) of leaders diverge by gender, with women more likely to view female leaders as stronger, while men are viewed as more adept at handling matters like national security — and this election was no exception. Data from [August through October](#) showed that women generally viewed a range of leadership characteristics as applying more to Harris than Trump by 9 points or higher, including bringing about changes that the country needs and improving the country's standing. Meanwhile, men consistently attributed these traits more to Trump.

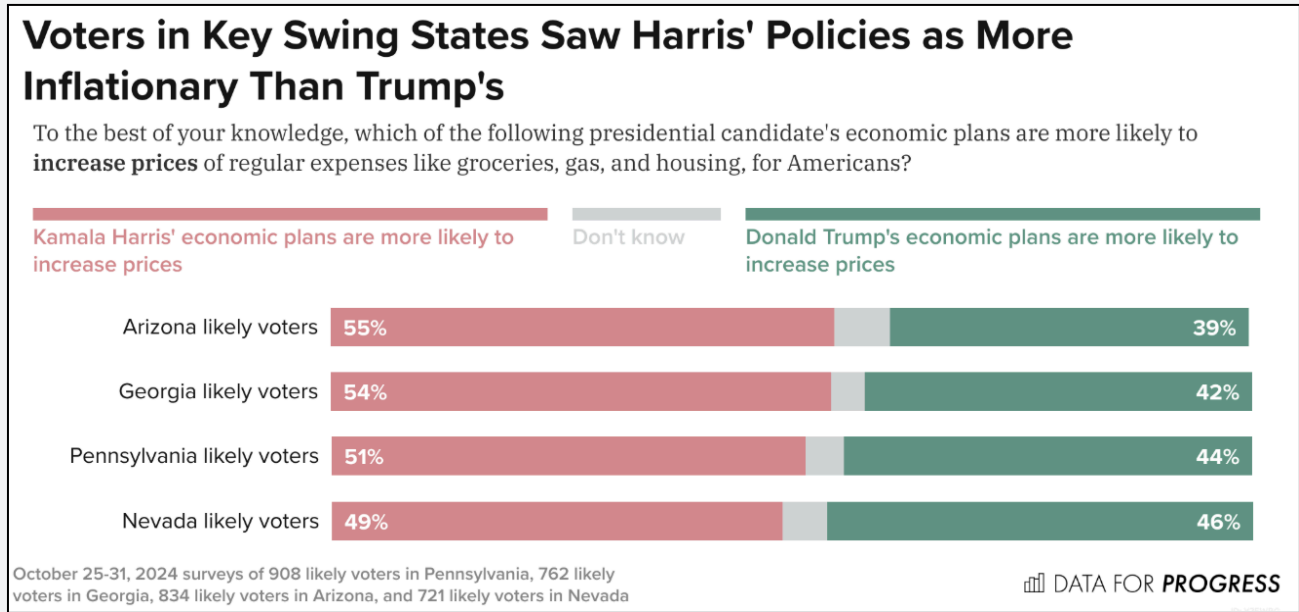


While Harris was able to create a surge in voter enthusiasm, gain ground on Trump in head-to-head polling compared with Biden, and improve her perception as a leader, key demographic groups still saw her as [tied to Biden](#). A survey in the campaign's final days showed that voters were split on whether they saw her policies as taking a new approach (44%) or one that would be similar to Biden's (50%). While strong majorities of Democrats and Black voters saw her agenda as a new approach, a plurality of Independent voters believed she would continue the same policies as Biden (49%). Although half of Latino voters viewed her as taking a new approach, 40% thought she would largely continue Biden's policies.

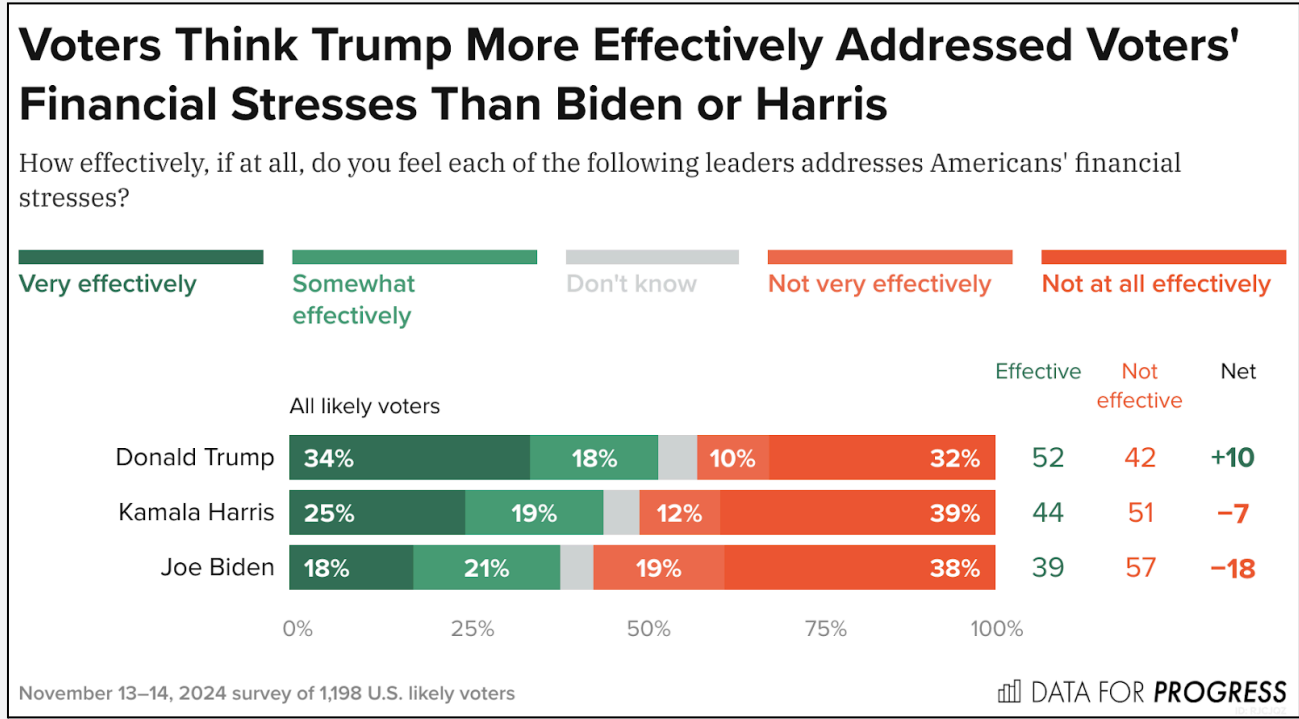


In [key swing states](#), voters were fairly aligned in thinking that Harris' economic plans were more likely to increase prices. While key swing states [shifted less to the right](#) than the national electorate — a sign of a strong campaign facing an uphill battle — this was ultimately not enough to overcome the perceptions of Harris' economic policies.

In Arizona, 55% of voters believed that Harris' plans were more likely to increase prices, while only 39% said the same about Trump. In Georgia, 54% saw Harris' plans as more likely to increase prices, including 62% of Independents in the state. More than half of voters in Pennsylvania (51%) saw Harris' plans as more likely to increase prices, compared with 44% saying the same about Trump. And in Nevada, the closest state surveyed on this question, a plurality (49%) of voters said that Harris' plans were more likely to increase prices, while 46% said this about Trump's plans.

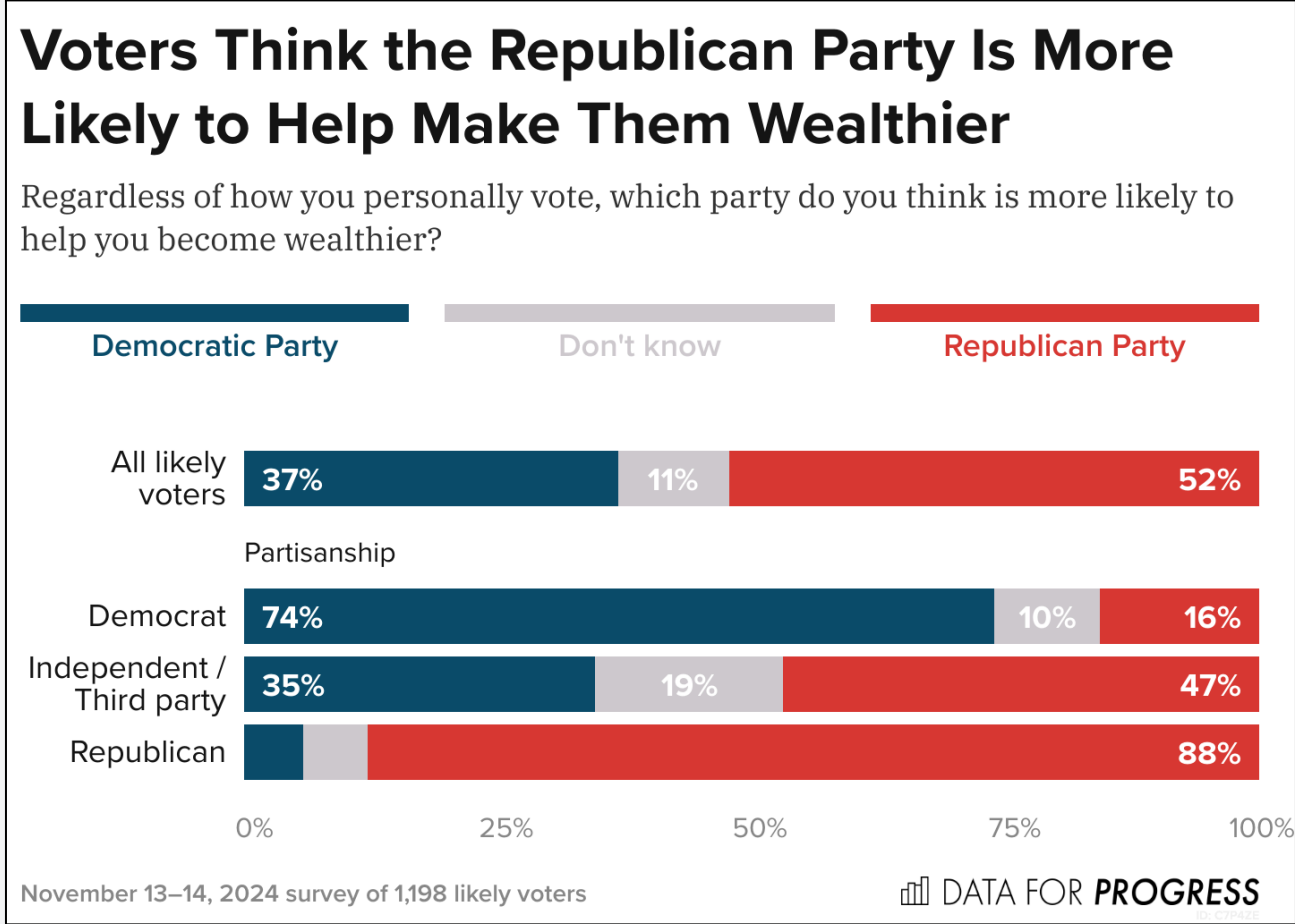


Harris faced disadvantages not only in terms of who voters thought would increase prices but also who they thought would more effectively address their broad financial concerns. When asked how effectively each political leader addressed voters' financial stresses, [52% of voters](#) in a post-election survey say Trump "very" effectively" or "somewhat effectively" addressed these anxieties, while only 44% and 39% of voters say the same about Harris and Biden, respectively.



This sentiment extends to young voters, Latino voters, and Independents, all of whom are more likely to say Trump, rather than Harris, was more effective in addressing Americans' financial stresses.

Moreover, in that same post-election survey, a majority of voters (52%) — including a plurality of Independents — say the Republican Party is more likely to help them become wealthier.



Despite the gains Harris made in narrowing Trump's trust advantage on economic issues, voters perceived Trump as more effective in addressing financial stress and viewed Republicans as the party that was more likely to improve their personal wealth. Voters continued to have an overwhelmingly negative impression of the economy — for which they blamed the Biden administration, to which Harris was inextricably linked.

Voters' Perceptions of the Economy

Throughout most of the Biden administration, voters expressed high disapproval of the direction of the economy. Both domestically and abroad, post-pandemic inflation was top of mind for voters, and incumbent parties globally faced intense [backlash](#) for it in recent elections. The 2024 U.S. presidential election was no different — in voters' eyes, the Biden administration was associated with higher costs of living and an economy in decline. Though standard economic metrics like [low unemployment](#), [growing GDP](#), [job and wage growth](#), and a [normalizing inflation rate](#) told a story of an American economy that was rebounding from the pandemic, Data for Progress' tracking of sentiment captured no parallel positive shift in voters' *perceptions* of the economy.

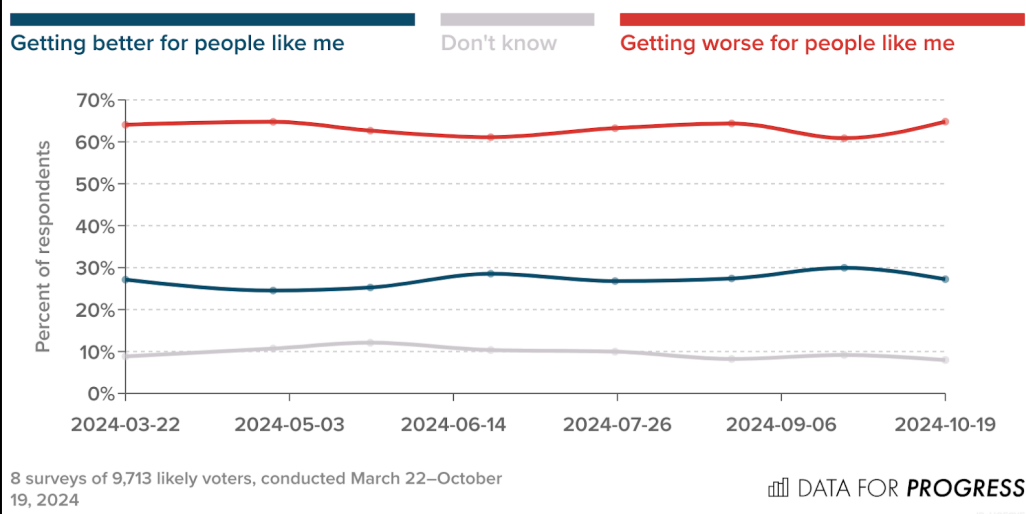
Americans who share the party of the president [generally](#) have [more positive views](#) of economic conditions than those who support the opposing party. This election, however, by a [2 to 1 margin](#), voters said that the economy was getting worse rather than getting better, *including* among demographic groups that are typically considered the Democratic "base." That ratio remained static from March to November.

[On average](#), a significant majority of Independents (66%), women (66%), Latino voters (62%), and voters under 45 (61%) said that the economy in general was getting worse for people like them. A majority of college-educated voters (56%) and half of (50%) Black voters also said the economy was getting worse, not better, for people like them. While on average, self-identified Democrats seemed to hold the most positive views on the economy (45% saying it's getting better, 44% saying it's getting worse), it is notable that in no survey since March where this question was tested did even a *majority* of self-identified Democrats respond that the economy in general was getting better for people like them.

A Wide Majority of Voters Consistently Said the Economy Was Getting Worse for People Like Them

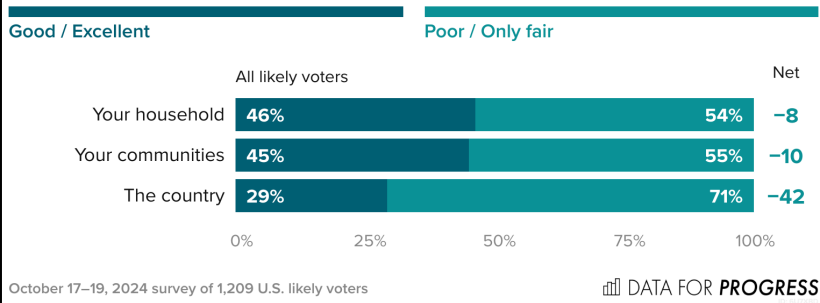
For each of the following, please say if they are getting better or worse for people like you:

– The economy in general



Voters Rated the Economic Conditions of Their Households and Communities Poorly, and Those of the Country Much Worse

How would you rate economic conditions of the following:



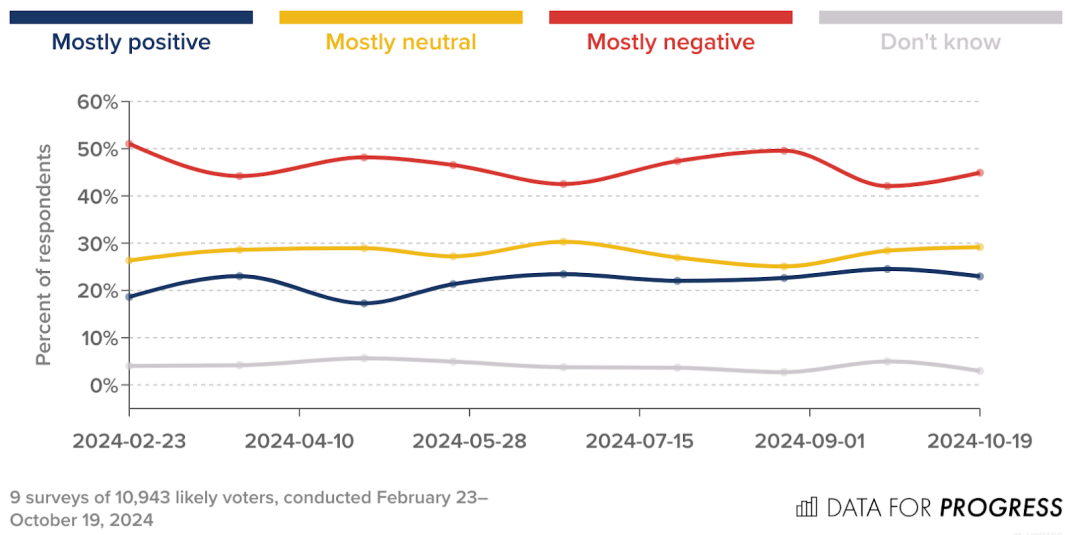
Across surveys since the [beginning of 2024](#), voters consistently expressed greater negative attitudes and concerns about the country's overall economic conditions than about their own households. For example, an October survey found that 54% and 55% of voters rated their households' and their communities' economic conditions, respectively, as "only fair" or "poor," while 71% said the same

about the country broadly.

In an increasingly [nationalized news environment](#), the gap between perceptions of national and local economic conditions may be explained or exacerbated by voters' media consumption. On average, [since February](#), 46% of voters consistently reported hearing mostly negative information about the economy, while only 22% reported hearing positive information. Democrats consistently reported hearing the greatest levels of positive information, but a plurality of most demographic groups, including voters under 45, college-educated voters, and Latino voters, consistently heard mostly negative information on the economy.

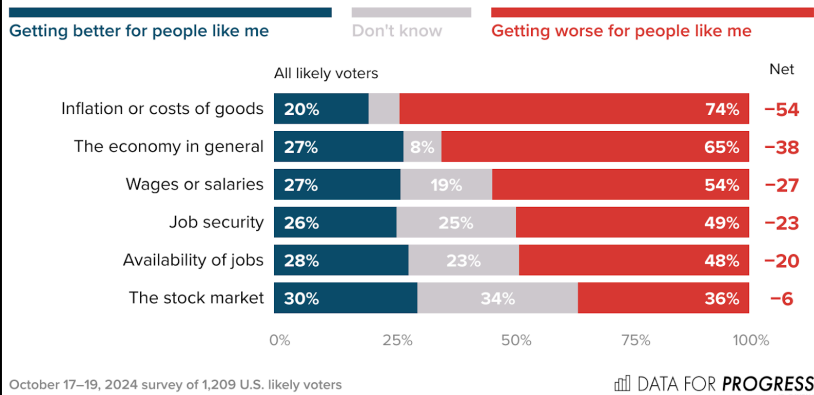
In the Months Prior to the Election, Voters Heard and Saw More Bad Information About the Economy Than Good Information

In the past month, has what you heard, read, or seen about the state of the economy been mostly positive, mostly negative, or mostly neutral?



Voters Largely Did Not Feel Any Aspect of the Economy Getting Better for People Like Them

For each of the following, please say if they are getting better or worse for people like you:



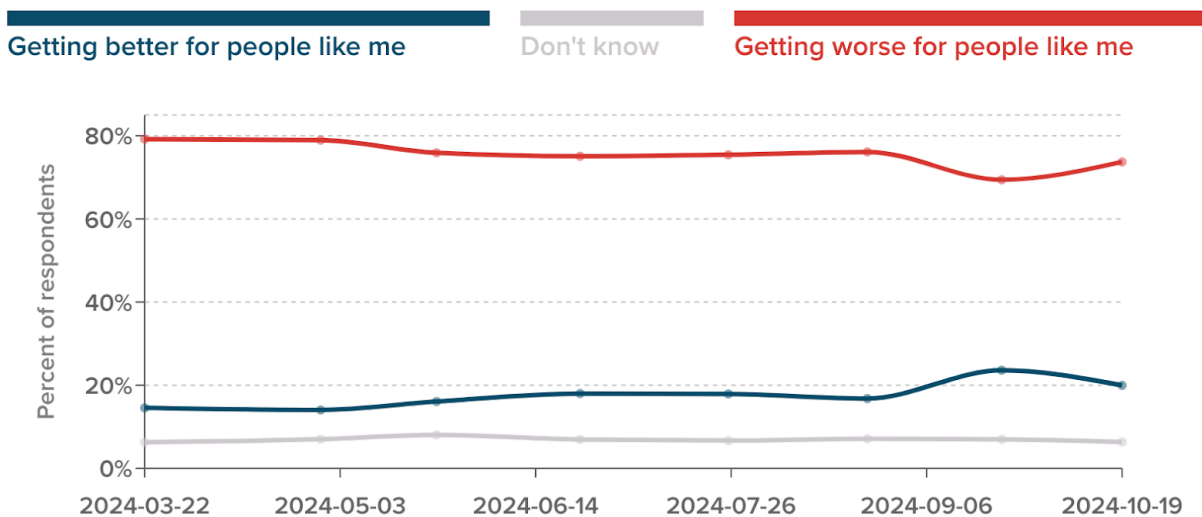
Since the start of 2024, when voters were asked about certain aspects of the economy — such as wages, jobs, and the stock market — they consistently said that these economic indicators were “[getting worse for people like me.](#)” rather than better. This was consistent with voters across age, race, gender, and education level. Democrats were the only group to report more positive than negative feelings about wages, the stock market, and the availability of jobs.

Voters also continued to show dissatisfaction with the cost of goods and services and rising inflation: More than [70%](#) said these costs were getting worse for people like themselves.

Voters Overwhelmingly and Consistently Reported Inflation and the Cost of Goods Getting Worse

For each of the following, please say if they are getting better or worse for people like you:

– Inflation or costs of goods



8 surveys of 9,713 likely voters, conducted March 22–October 19, 2024

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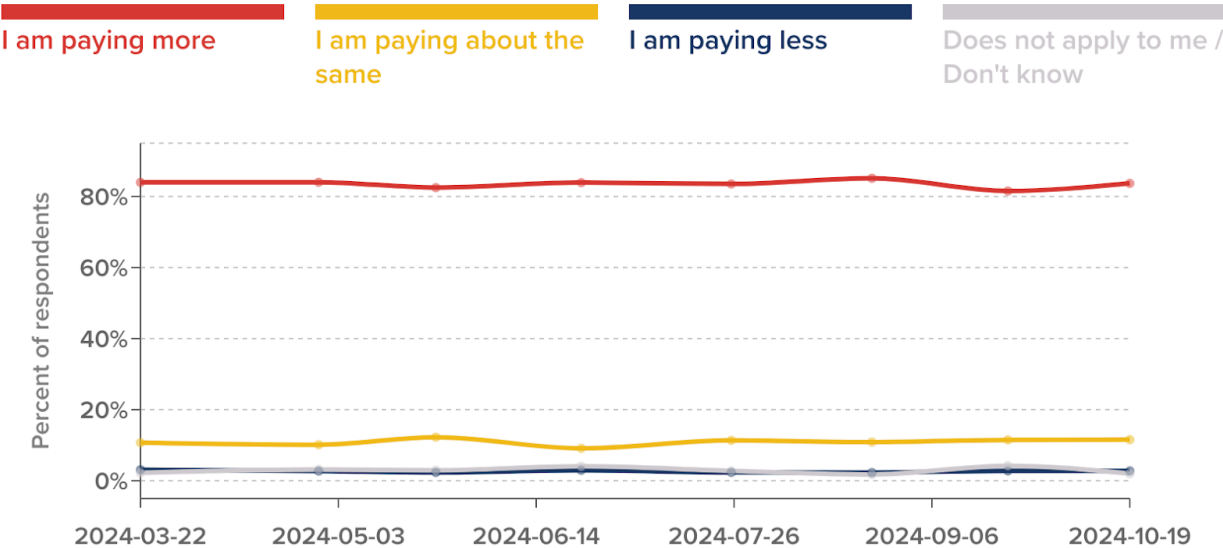
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When asked about different expenses, [84% of voters](#), on average, reported paying more for groceries since the previous year. That figure stayed largely static even as the year progressed. Moreover, this financial pressure was consistently reported by overwhelming majorities across age, race, gender, partisanship, and education level.

More Than 3 in 4 Voters Consistently Reported Paying More for Groceries

In the last year, have you experienced a change in prices for the following goods? That is, are you paying more, about the same, or less?

— Groceries and food

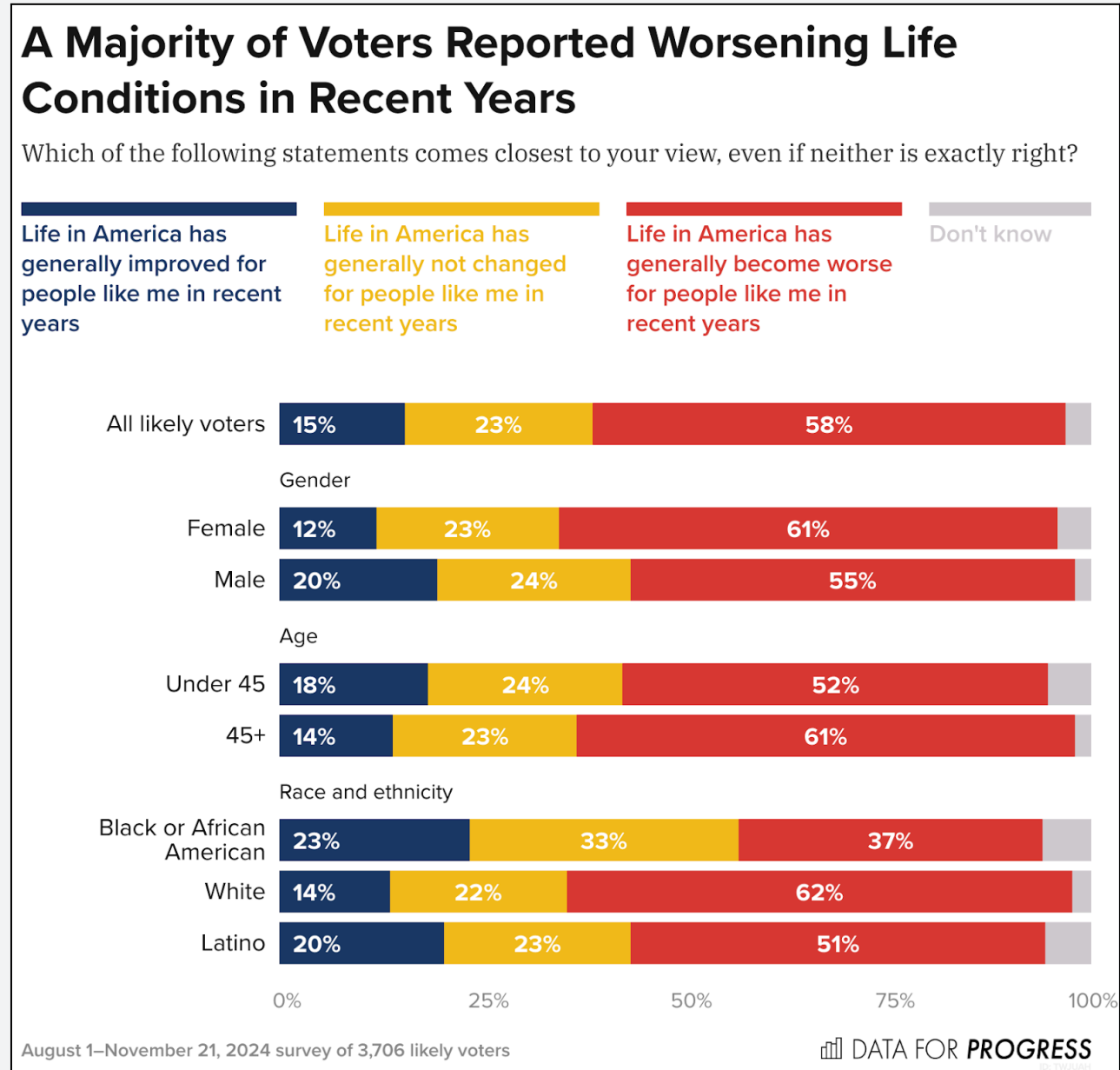


8 surveys of 9,713 likely voters, conducted March 22–October 19, 2024

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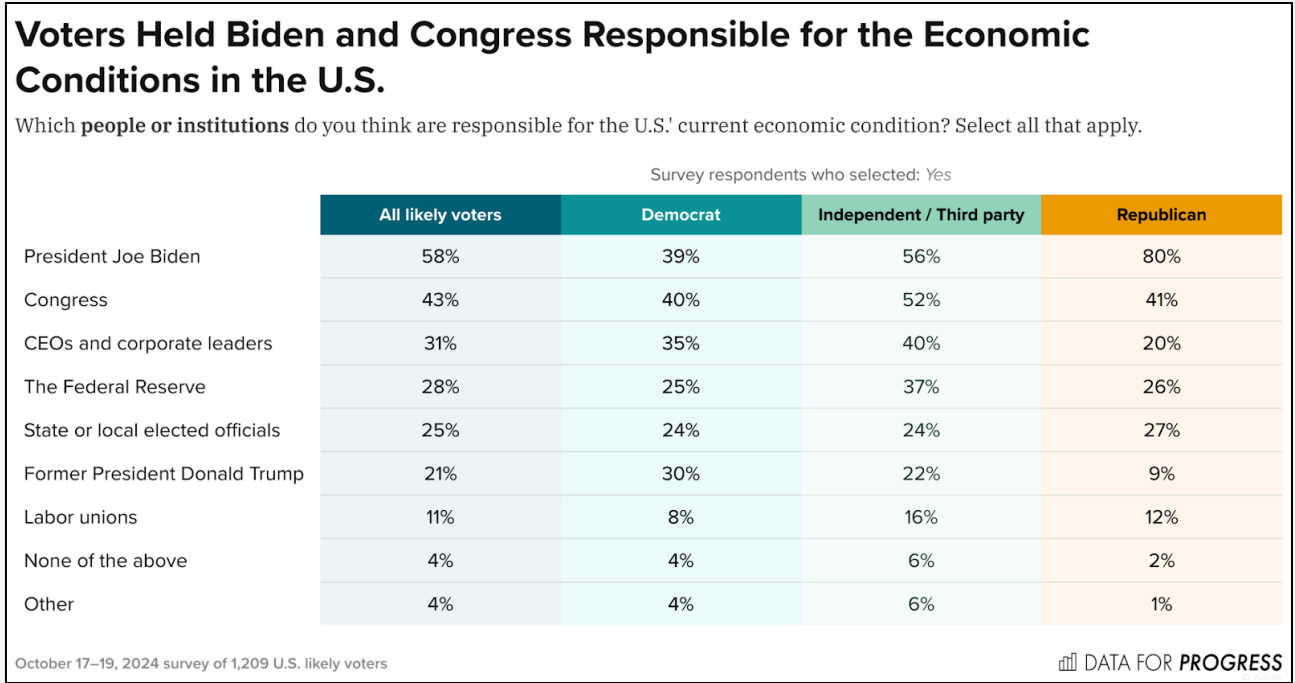
A majority of voters, including majorities across demographic groups, also reported paying more on utility bills, such as water and electricity bills, as well as gas and household goods, such as appliances and furniture, in the last year.

Furthermore, voters held a relatively pessimistic outlook on living conditions. Specifically, nearly 60% of likely voters over a [survey period](#) from August 1 to November 3 reported that life had become worse in recent years for people like them. Almost a quarter of voters reported life had not changed, while only 15% said their lives had generally improved. These numbers paint a stark picture of voters' level of dissatisfaction with their current living conditions.

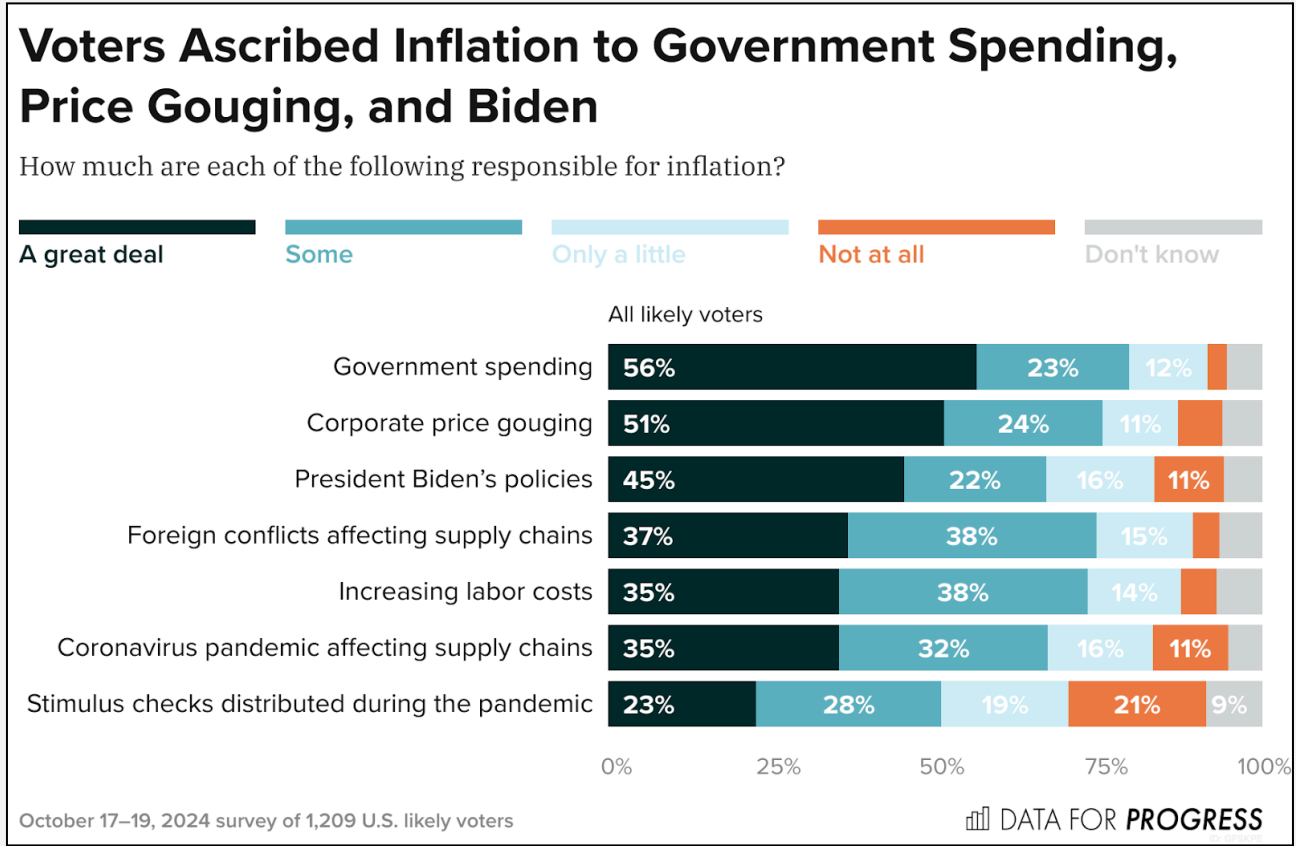


Despite the Biden administration’s efforts to highlight the gains made on key economic metrics like record stock market gains, a historically low unemployment rate, and the slowing rate of inflation, voters continued to have overwhelmingly negative views of the economy — and unsurprisingly, they placed much of the blame on the man in charge.

In the month preceding the election, a [majority of voters](#) held Biden (58%) responsible for the current economic conditions in the U.S., followed by Congress (43%) — and this blame was consistent throughout the year. Throughout Biden’s tenure, as exemplified by a final October tracking poll, Democrats were split on holding corporate leaders (35%), Biden (39%), and Congress (40%) accountable for the economic conditions in the U.S., while 8 in 10 Republicans and a majority of Independents (56%) blamed Biden.

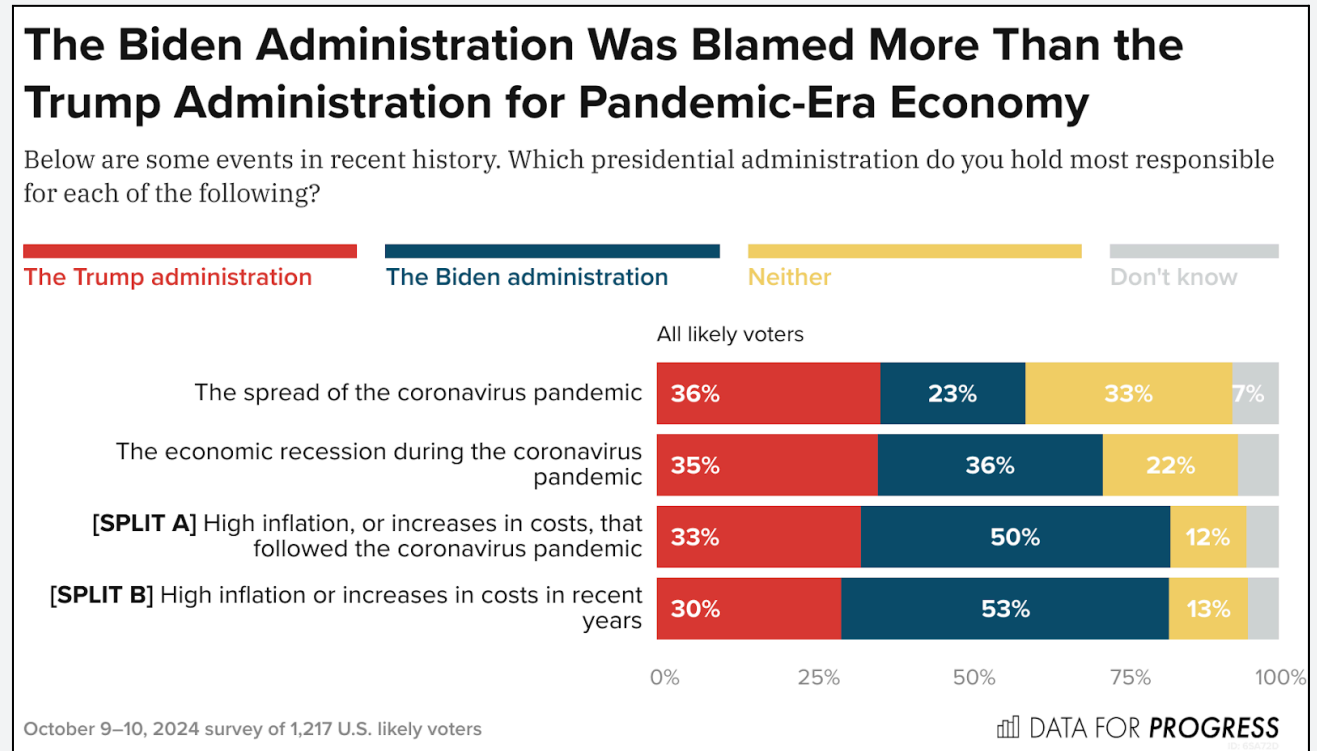


When asked more specifically about assigning blame for inflation, voters have [consistently placed](#) the most responsibility on “government spending,” followed by “corporate price gouging,” and then “President Biden’s policies.” Notably, supply chain disruptions during the pandemic were consistently ranked among the lowest contributors to inflation, despite [economic evidence](#) to the contrary. These dynamics remained remarkably static throughout the 2024 presidential campaign.



While [voters were evenly split](#) on whether they blamed the Biden or Trump administration more for the economic recession during the pandemic, Independents blamed Biden more by a 5-point margin. The Biden administration also by far held the blame for pandemic-era high inflation, including among a majority of young voters, regardless of whether or not the inflation was explicitly tied to the pandemic in our questioning.

Latino voters, who placed higher blame on the Trump administration for the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, were slightly more likely to blame the Trump administration for inflation when it was tied to the pandemic, but more likely to blame the Biden administration for inflation when it was not tied to the pandemic.



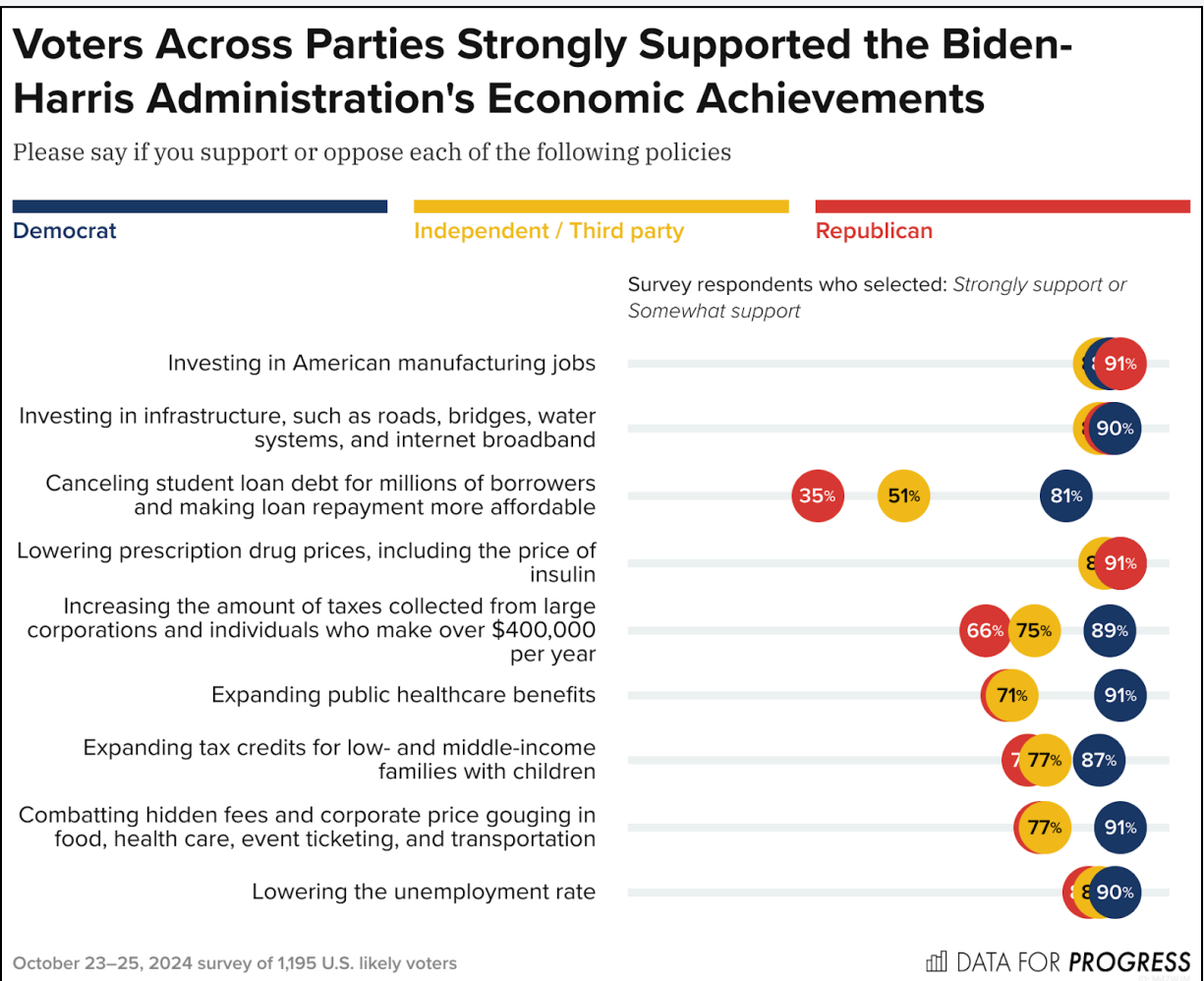
Despite [optimistic](#) economic forecasts and the gradual cooling of inflation rates, voters were dissatisfied with the high costs of necessities and thus with the economy broadly — and blamed the Biden administration and government spending for it. Voters wanted policies to ease their strained household budgets and improve their material circumstances, but as described in the following section, they were unlikely to hear about (or report feeling the effects of) steps the Biden-Harris administration took to this end.

The “Bidenomics” Popularity vs. Awareness Gap

While the Biden administration has faced sharp disapproval for its handling of the economy, individual items from its policy agenda poll exceptionally well.

Data for Progress has consistently found that many of the populist economic policies that the Biden administration has pursued are [broadly popular](#) with voters, even Republicans. Proposals such as universal pre-K and child care, a \$17 federal minimum wage, and pro-union labor protections command bipartisan support.

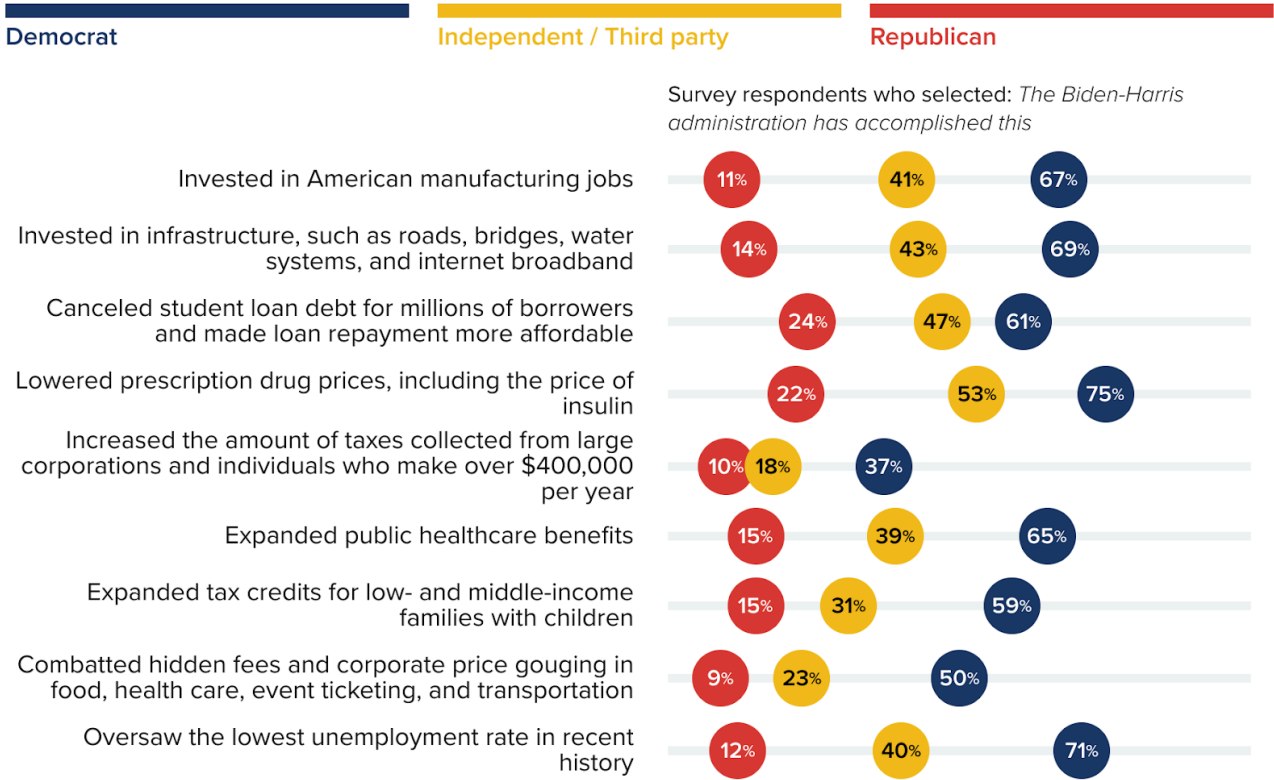
In [polling](#) just two weeks before the election, when voters were asked about the Biden-Harris administration’s policies without being told that they were accomplished by Biden and Harris, each of the policies (except for student loan forgiveness) had broad support across party lines. Investing in American manufacturing and infrastructure and lowering prices of prescriptions including insulin, both of which passed under the Biden administration, received near-unanimous support across party lines. More than 3 in 4 voters backed raising taxes on the rich and corporations, expanding health care benefits and tax credits for low- and middle-income families with children, and combatting hidden fees and price gouging.



However, news about the achievements of the Biden-Harris administration simply failed to break through. In the same set of polling, lowering the cost of insulin was the only item that over 50% of Independents believed Biden and Harris had accomplished. A majority of voters also said they did not think or did not know that the Biden-Harris administration had accomplished other policies that they supported, including investing in manufacturing and infrastructure. Seventy-two percent of voters, including majorities of Independents, young voters, college-educated voters, voters of color, and swing state voters, similarly responded that they did not think or did not know that the Biden-Harris administration had taken actions around hidden fees and corporate price gouging.

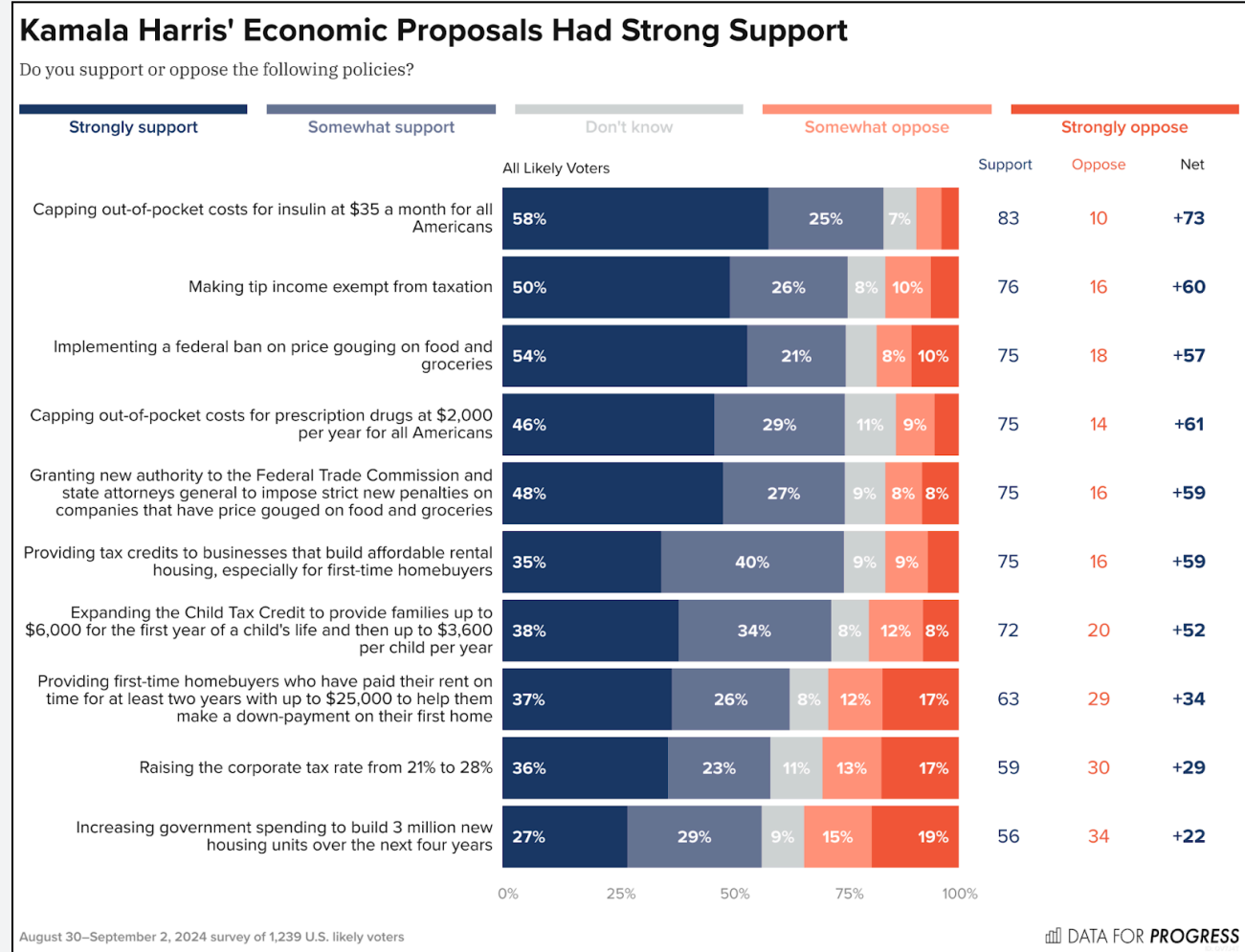
At the End of the Cycle, Voters Still Didn't Know Enough About the Biden-Harris Administration's Achievements

To the best of your knowledge, please say if you think the Biden-Harris administration has or has **not** accomplished each of the following over the past four years.



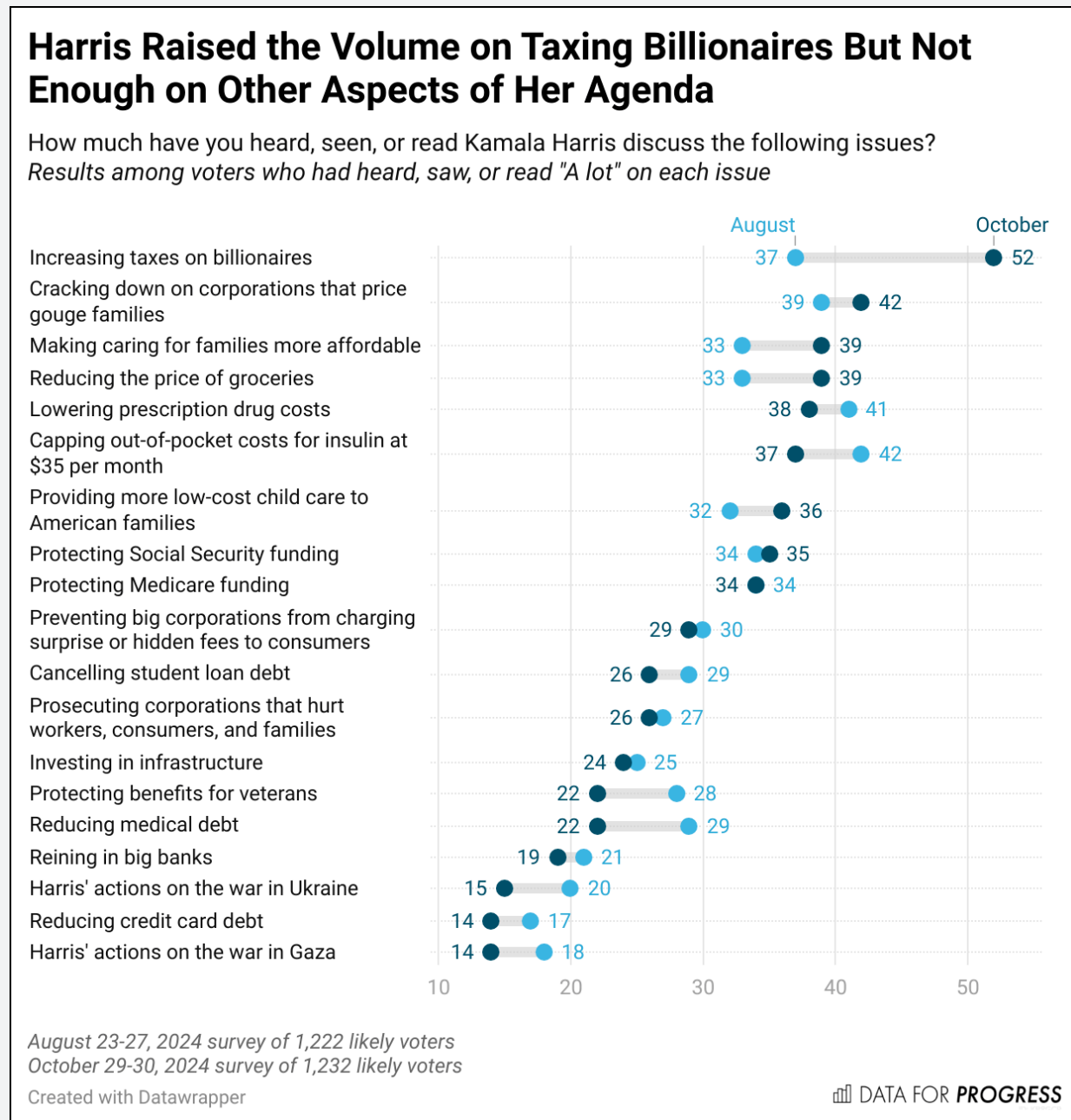
October 23–25, 2024 survey of 1,195 U.S. likely voters

Data for Progress found a similar dynamic with Harris' campaign agenda. It was [broadly popular](#) with voters, especially her economic proposals to implement a federal ban on price gouging, build more homes, provide down payment assistance to first-time homebuyers, and create [Medicare home care subsidies](#).



But even though the agenda was popular, a majority of voters said that they did not hear “a lot” from Harris on key components of her plan. To her credit, Harris was able to raise the salience of her policies to increase taxes on billionaires. In [August](#), 37% of voters reported hearing Harris speak on this issue “a lot.” [October](#) survey data showed this figure rose by 15 points to 52%.

However, awareness of the remainder of her agenda remained largely stagnant between August and October, particularly on policies that would directly address concerns over high costs or materially benefit voters’ lives, such as tackling price gouging, which voters [strongly supported](#) as an effective way to lower prices. And while Harris briefly touted a plan in early fall to ban [price gouging](#), by October a majority of voters (57%) had heard only “a little” or “nothing at all” about cracking down on corporations that price gouge families. Similarly, 61% of voters had heard “a little” or “nothing at all” about plans to reduce the price of groceries.

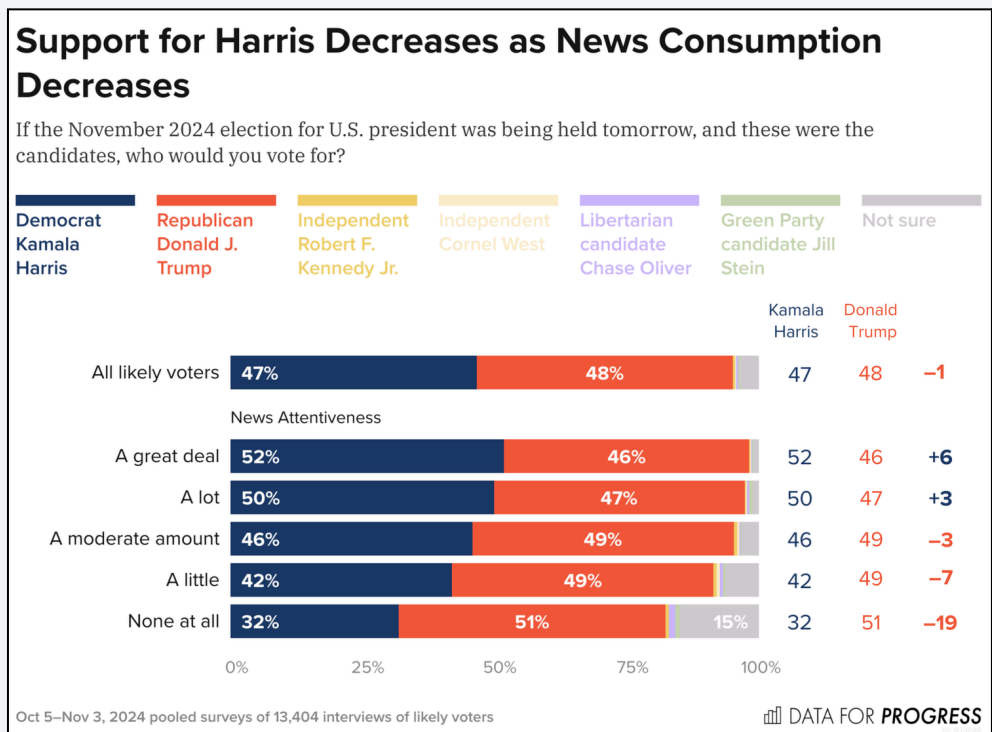


Familiarity with her agenda was driven by partisanship to some extent, where Democratic voters were the most likely to have heard about some of her plans, such as capping costs for insulin (52% heard a lot), for example, compared with Independents and Republicans (33% and 25% respectively). The same October data also showed Democrats had more familiarity with other parts of her agenda as well, such as her plans to reduce the price of groceries, with 56% having heard a lot, compared with 38% of Independents and 21% of Republicans.

Swing voters reported some of the lowest levels of familiarity with her agenda, particularly on key policies to reduce costs: Twenty-four percent of swing voters said they heard “a lot” about her discussing the price of groceries, and 25% said the same about policies to crack down on price gouging by corporations.

In parallel with a lack of knowledge as to what Harris would do for voters — particularly among [swing voters](#) — Harris also faced a steep challenge with engaging the types of voters who turn out in presidential elections: low-propensity voters who typically only vote once every four years and rarely engage with [political news](#). While Harris won with voters who paid attention to political news, her share significantly dropped among those who paid little to no attention to political news.

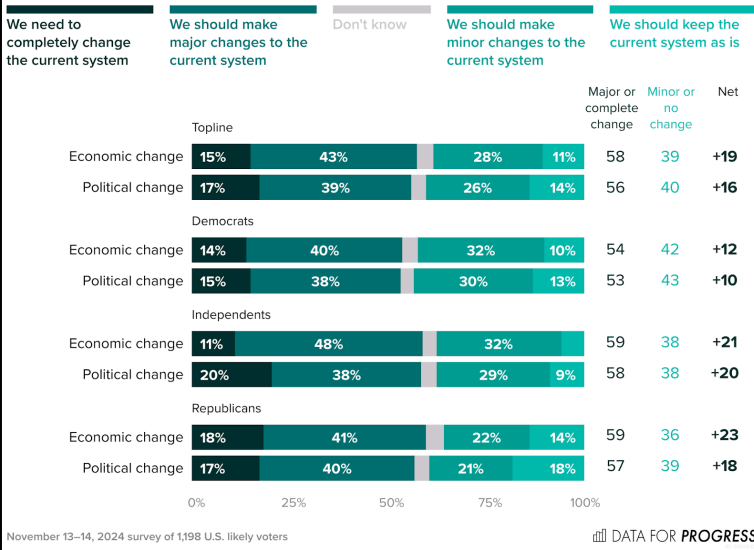
These less-engaged voters are also the most likely to rely on social media such as YouTube and Facebook — platforms that the Harris campaign did not reach. Ultimately, despite the popularity of a progressive economic agenda and the gains Harris made in trust on the economy, she did not reach highly disengaged voters and address their frustration with the economy.



Backlash to Immigration, Global Disorder, and the Status Quo

Voters Want Significant Changes to Our Political and Economic Systems

Which comes closest to your view about the [political/economic] system in America, even if none are exactly right?



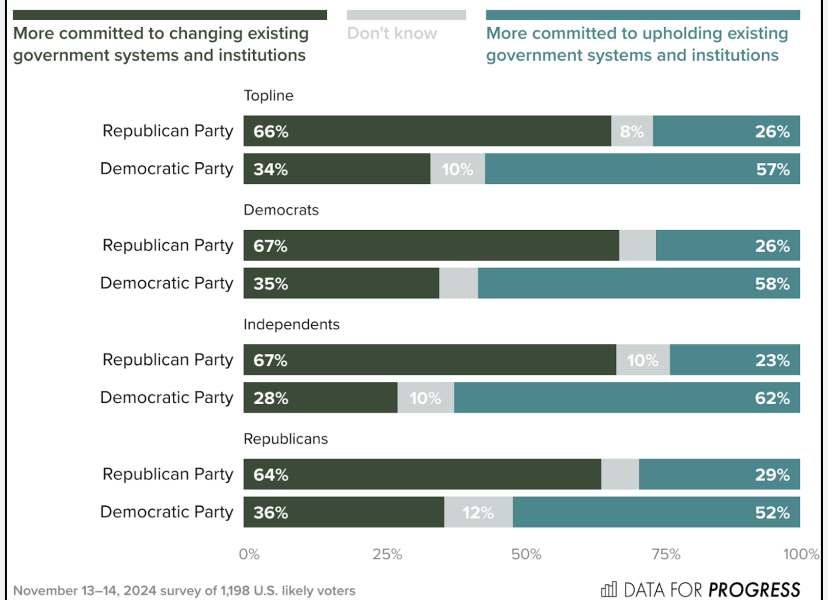
While inflation and the economy — and Biden’s poor approval on these issues — were the main factors for voters this election, Harris was also weighed down by voters’ lack of trust in the Democratic Party on immigration and foreign policy, as well as the perception that she and the party would maintain a broken status quo.

[Post-election polling](#) shows that voters across party lines want to see significant changes to the current political and economic systems. Only 11% and 14% of voters, respectively, want to keep our economic and political systems as they are.

When asked whether the Democratic Party or Republican Party is more committed to changing or upholding existing government systems, about two-thirds of voters say that Republicans are more committed to change, across party lines. Fifty-seven percent of voters say that Democrats are more committed to upholding existing government systems.

Voters Think Republicans Are More Committed to Change, While Democrats Are More Committed to Upholding Existing Institutions

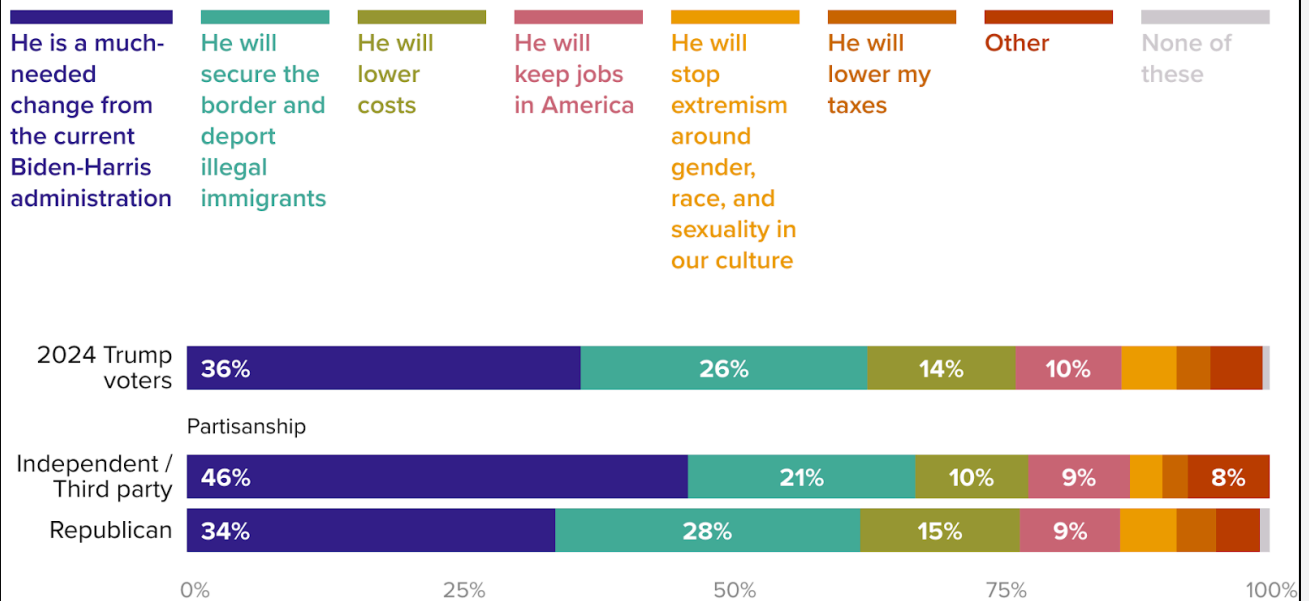
Do you think the [Republican Party/Democratic Party] is more committed to changing or upholding existing government systems and institutions?



This perception of change carried over to the election, clearly benefiting Trump. In a post-election [survey](#), Trump voters were asked why they voted for him and provided a list of reasons. A plurality of Trump voters (36%), including a higher share of Independent Trump voters (46%), say he “is a much-needed change from the current Biden-Harris administration,” followed by “he will secure the border and deport illegal immigrants” (26%).

Trump Voters Say They Voted for Him Because He Is a Change From the Biden-Harris Administration and Will Secure the Border

Which of the following best describes why you voted for Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election?



November 15–18, 2024 survey of 612 likely voters who voted for Donald Trump in 2024

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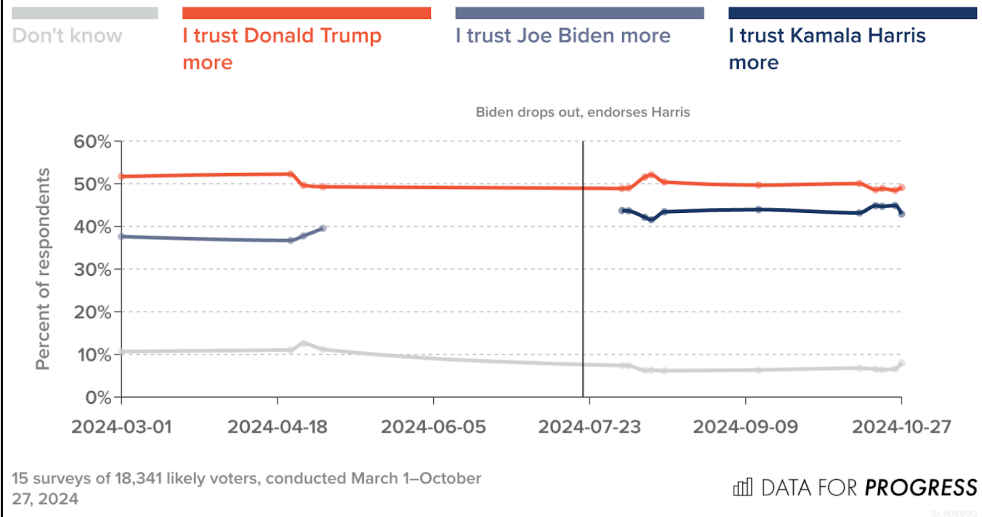
BY PROGRESS

Beyond changing the status quo, voters [saw Trump](#) as better able to handle the crisis at the border, both during Biden’s candidacy and after the transition to Harris.

Voters Trusted Trump More Than Biden and Harris to Handle Immigration

Who do you trust more to handle each of the following issues?

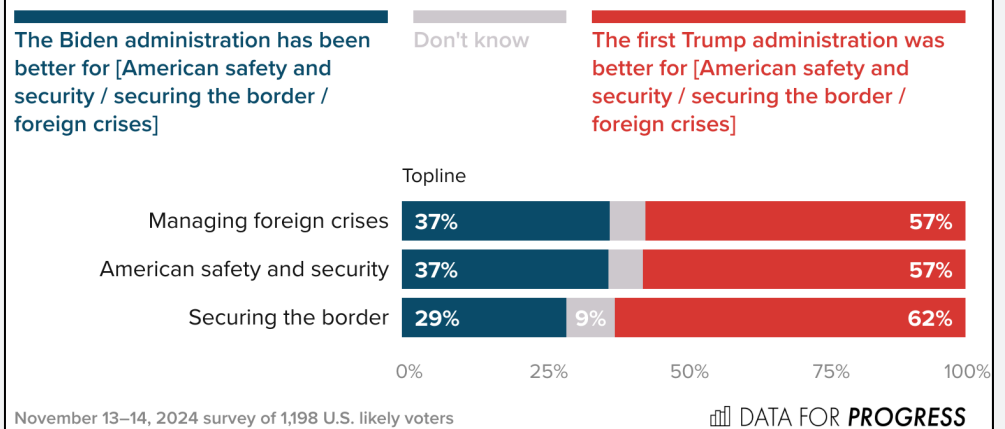
– Immigration



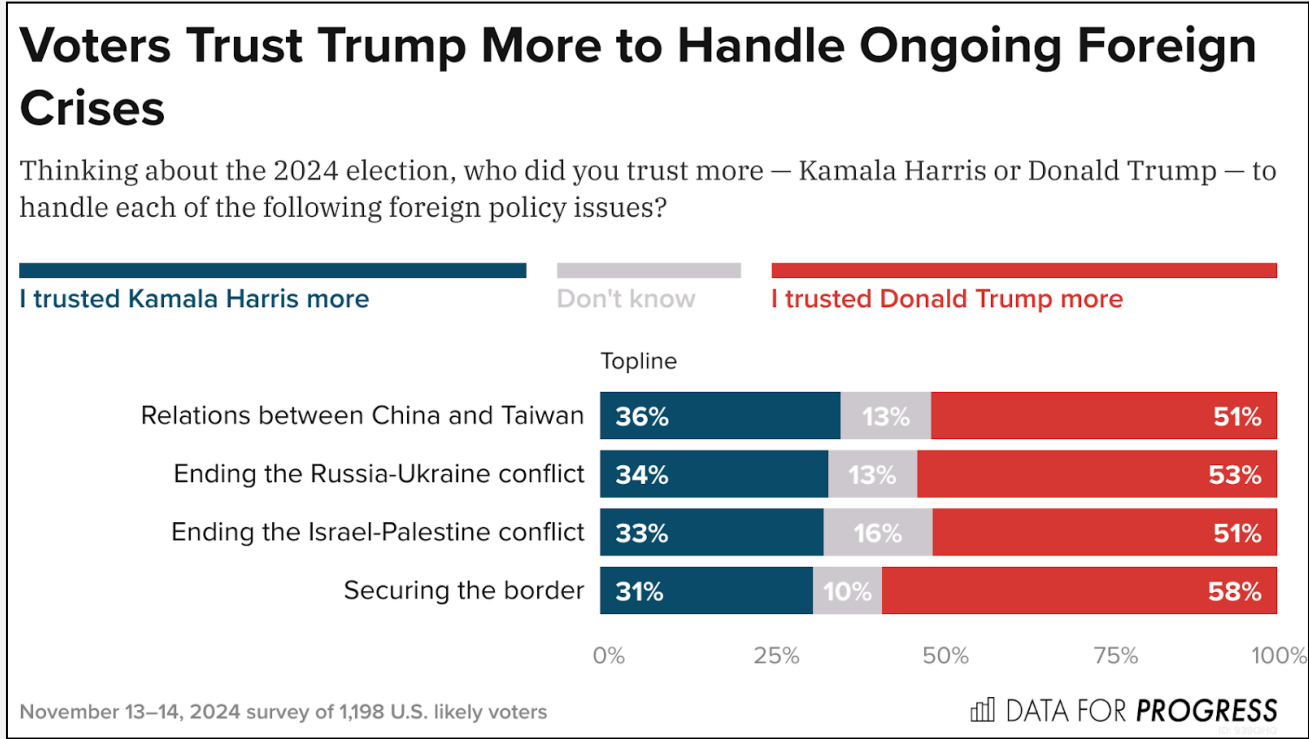
Voters also believe the first [Trump administration](#) was better than the Biden administration at managing foreign crises, American safety and security, and securing the border.

Voters Think the First Trump Administration Was Better at Addressing the Border, American Security, and Foreign Crises

Which of the following statements do you agree with **more**, even if neither is exactly right?



Similarly, when asked about specific foreign policy issues, including the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, and China and Taiwan, a majority of voters trust Trump more than Harris, while only around one-third of voters trust Harris more. Men (by margins of more than 20 points) and voters under 45 (by margins of more than 10 points) trust Trump more than Harris to secure the border and handle each of these three foreign conflicts. Latino voters trust Trump more than Harris to secure the border (+20), end the Russia-Ukraine conflict (+17), and end the Israel-Palestine conflict (+7).



Ultimately, voters were and continue to be largely dissatisfied with the status quo, and want to see broad changes to systems in place that uphold the status quo. Not only did the Biden-Harris administration take the blame, but voters saw Republicans as the most apt to bring this change.

Abortion and Democracy

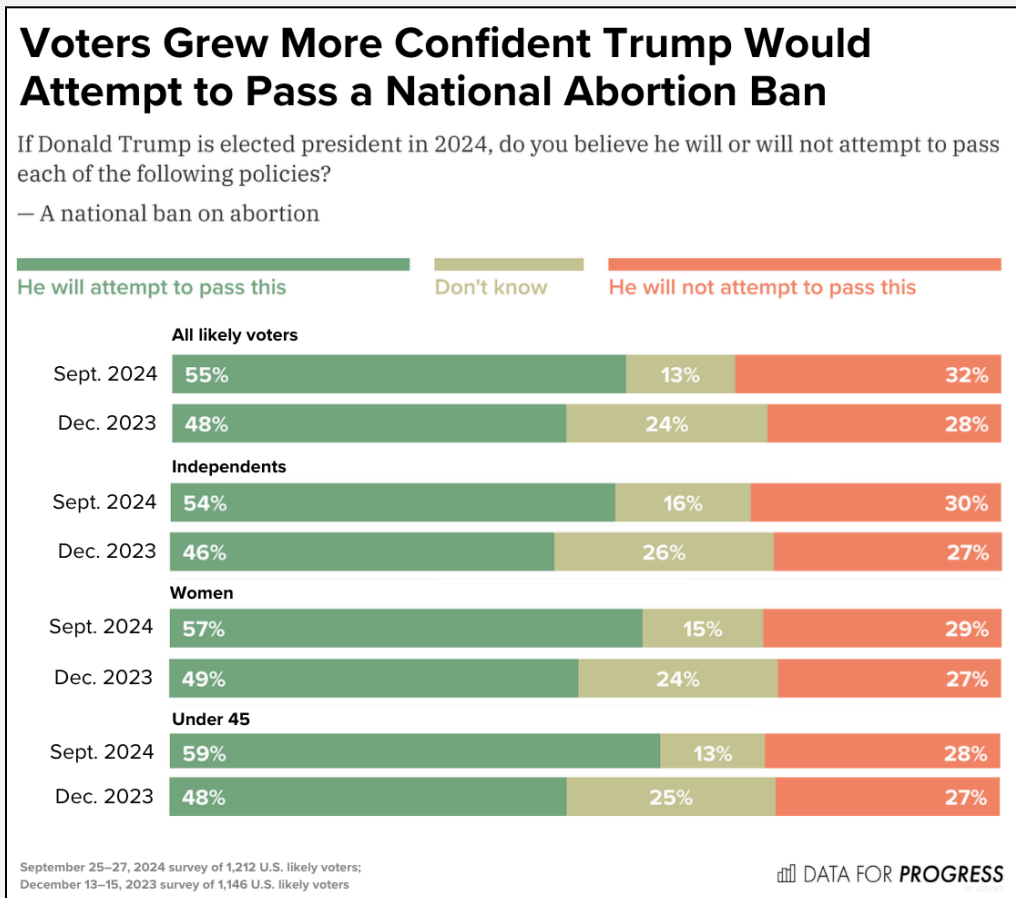
While Harris was weighed down by inflation and the economy, immigration, foreign conflicts, and the perception of being tied to a broken status quo, her campaign hoped that two strong issues for Democrats — abortion and protecting democracy — would buoy her support.

Abortion proved to be a particularly damaging issue for Republican congressional and statewide candidates in the 2022 midterm elections. However, it was unclear what role abortion would play in the 2024 election, and to what extent voters would associate Trump with ongoing restrictions or view him as a threat to a future loss of rights.

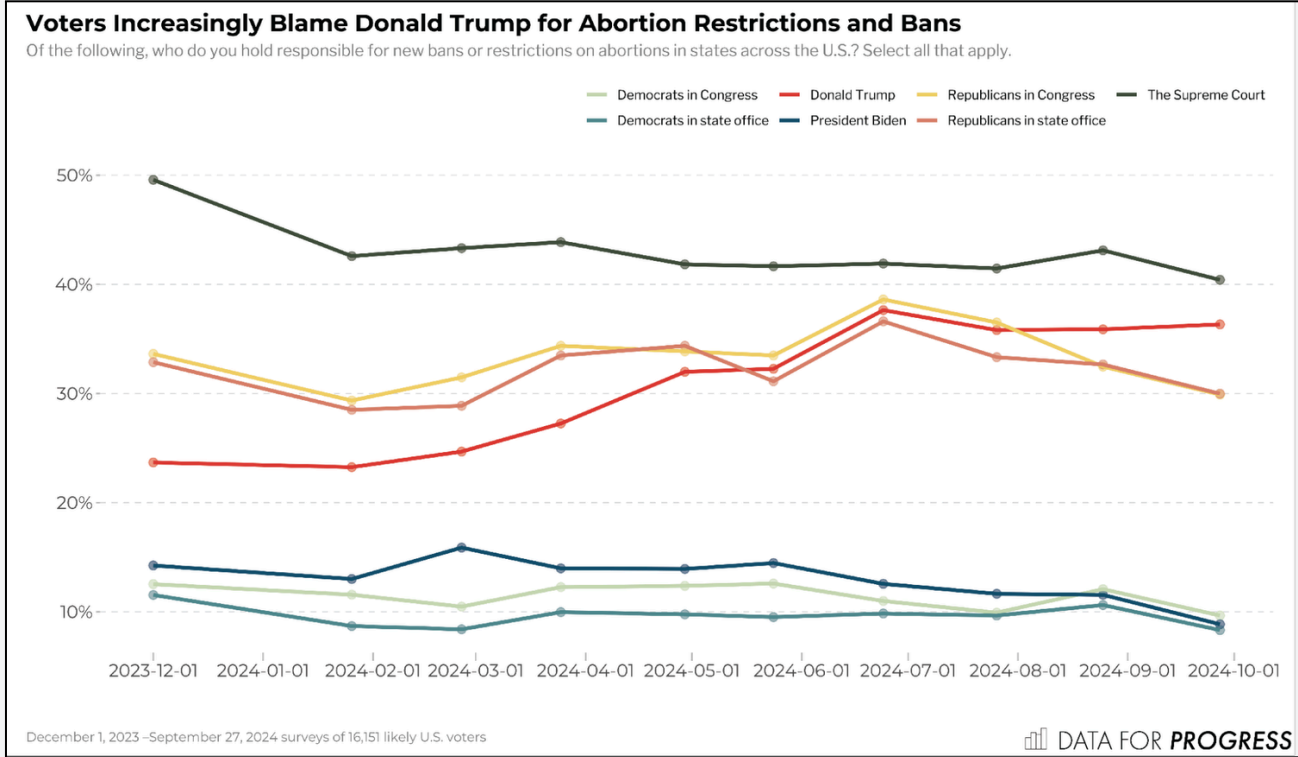
In December 2023, polling showed that less than half of voters believed Trump would attempt to pass a national abortion ban. Additionally, voters blamed the Supreme Court and Republicans in Congress and state office more than they blamed Trump for new abortion bans across the country.

Throughout the campaign, Harris and her allies went on offense to brand Trump on abortion, specifically calling out the “Trump abortion ban” in her [speeches](#) and [paid media](#).

Since the beginning of the year, Data for Progress saw an [increase](#) in the percentage of voters who thought Trump would attempt to pass a national abortion ban if elected — from 48% to 55%.



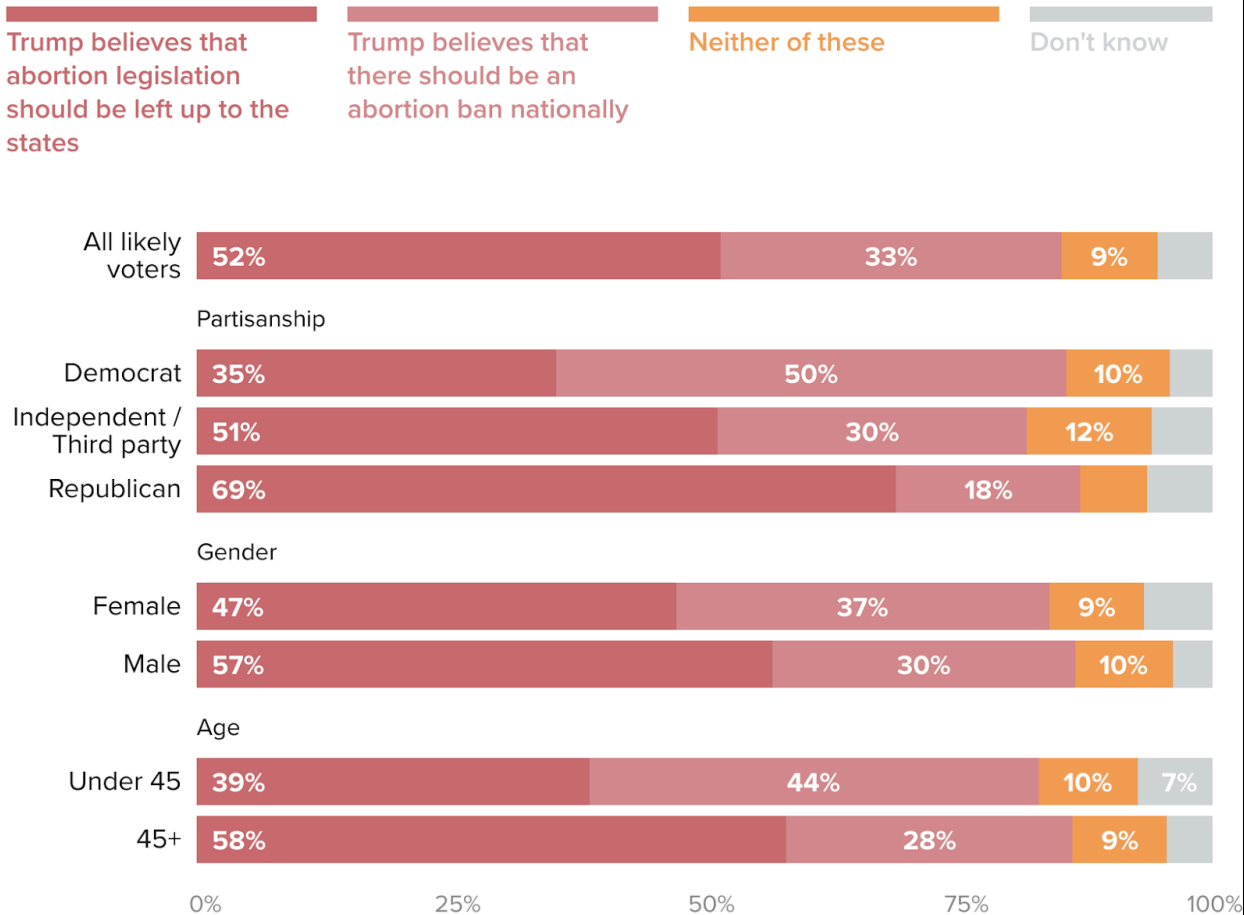
There was also a notable [increase](#) in the percentage of voters who blamed Trump for new bans on abortion. In [December 2023](#), only 24% of voters selected Trump, among a list of political actors, as responsible for abortion restrictions across the U.S., compared with 50% who chose the Supreme Court. In September, 36% of voters chose Trump — a 12-point increase.



However, despite more voters directly viewing Trump as responsible for abortion restrictions, [survey data](#) from October also showed that many voters were swayed by Trump’s attempts to moderate his stance on this issue. When asked whether they think Trump prefers leaving abortion legislation up to the states or enacting a national ban, a majority of voters (52%) also think that Trump prefers the former. This includes a plurality of women (47%) and a majority of independents (51%). Additionally, when presented with [Trump’s claims](#) that abortion should be left up to the states, voters were [closely split](#) in whether they viewed him as being honest in that statement. While 48% of voters believed he was being dishonest in his claims and that he would, in fact, sign national restrictions on abortion, 45% believed he would *not* sign any national restrictions.

Voters Thought That Trump Would Prefer to Leave Abortion Legislation up to the States

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following is Trump's position on abortion?



October 5–7, 2024 survey of 1,245 likely voters

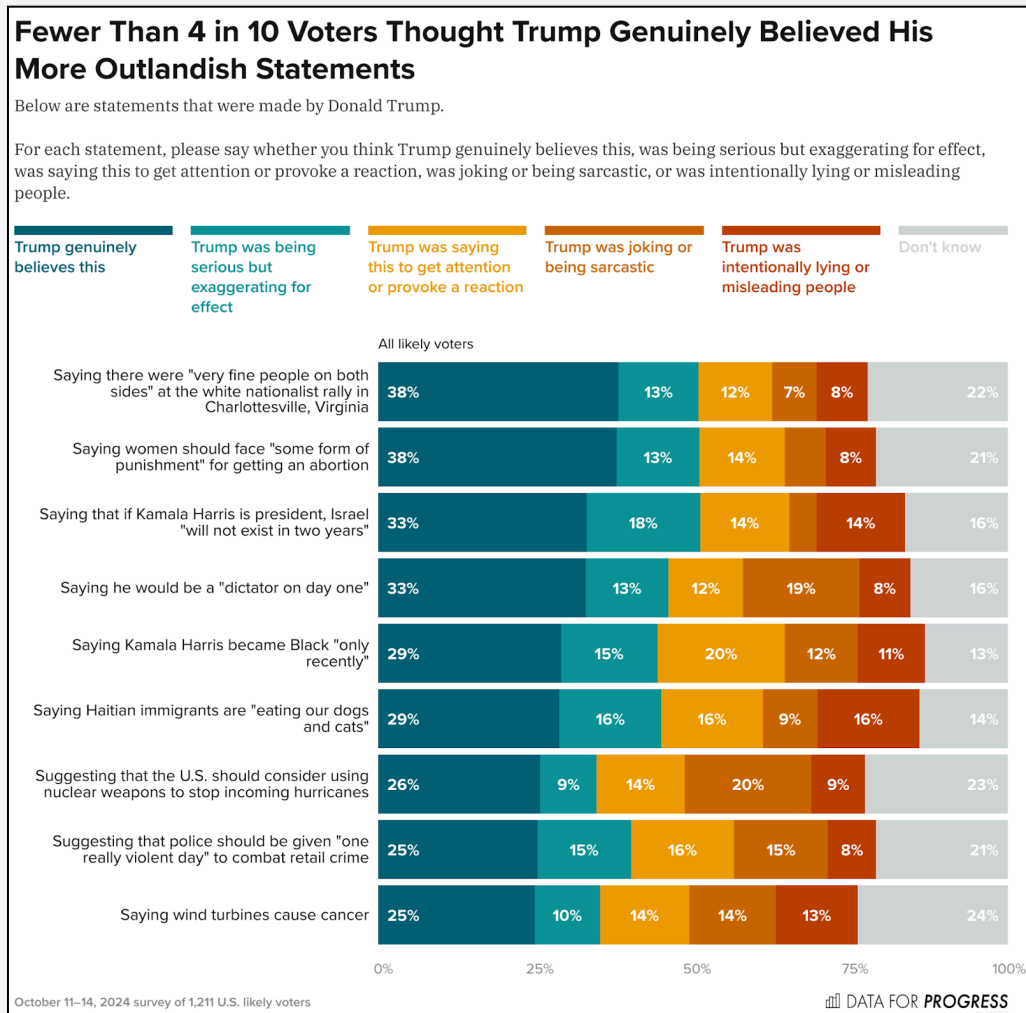
DATA FOR PROGRESS

Voters were also swayed by Trump’s messaging around [Project 2025](#), published in 2023 by the Heritage Foundation and endorsed by dozens of other conservative organizations — which Republican candidates, including Trump and running mate JD Vance, largely attempted to distance themselves from.

Project 2025 was highly concerning to voters. A [majority of voters](#) (64%) said they were “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about Republicans implementing the agenda, and of these voters, the top reason for their concern was that Project 2025 would make the country less democratic by giving Trump and his allies too much power over the government (52%).

However, compared to abortion, there was less consensus among voters on whether they believed that Trump was aligned with the plan’s agenda or not. In a [survey](#) fielded at the beginning of October, only 44% of voters said that they thought Trump supported Project 2025, while 22% said they thought that Trump did not support the plan, 19% weren’t sure either way, and 15% said they didn’t know what Project 2025 was at all.

Data for Progress findings indicated that part of Democrats’ struggle to pin Trump to the Project 2025 agenda, and other extremist positions, was that voters don’t take everything he says seriously. For six of the nine [outlandish Trump statements](#) that were tested, less than half of voters said that Trump was being serious at all (that he “genuinely believes this” or that he “was being serious but exaggerating for effect”).



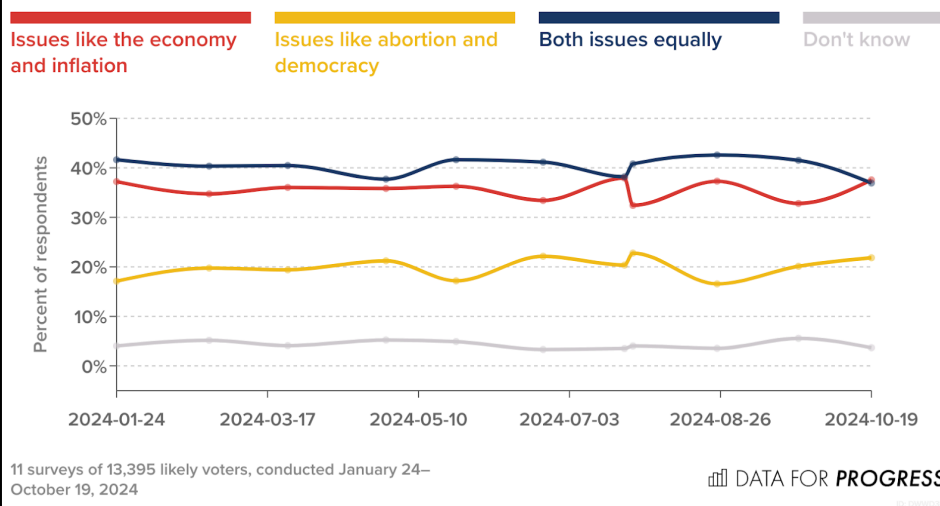
In addition to many voters doubting Trump’s extremism on abortion and democracy, these issues were also less resonant with voters this election than they were two years ago. While abortion and democracy had a galvanizing impact on the 2022 electorate, this was a misleading signal, as that electorate consisted of more [engaged](#) and [frequent](#) voters than the broader 2024 electorate. Despite some movement in how much voters blamed Trump for abortion restrictions and notable [victories](#) in 7 of 10 state referendums to enshrine abortion rights, the priorities of the less-engaged 2024 electorate were significantly more driven by [economic concerns](#).

Survey data throughout 2024 suggested that presidential likely voters were prioritizing economic concerns more than concerns regarding abortion and democracy in the presidential election. [By October](#), when asked if the outcome of the presidential election would have the biggest impact on 1)

issues like the economy and inflation, 2) issues like abortion and democracy, or 3) both issues equally, voters were more split in believing the election would most greatly impact only economic issues (38%) or both issues equally (37%), while a smaller percentage of voters (22%) were prioritizing issues like abortion and democracy.

Voters Were Split in Viewing the Election as Important Only for the Economy or Both the Economy and Social Issues

Do you think the outcome of the November presidential election will have the biggest impact on issues like the economy and inflation or on issues like abortion and democracy?



There were competing pressures on these two issues by partisanship. In the month before the election, Democrats were almost equally split between saying the election would impact both issues equally (38%) and saying it would have the biggest impact on issues like abortion and democracy (35%), while only 24% selected the economy. Independents, in contrast, were much more split between saying the election would impact both issues equally (39%) and saying it would have the biggest impact on the economy (35%), while only 21% said it would most greatly impact abortion and democracy. And Republicans largely indexed on the economy, with 54% saying the election would have the biggest impact on the economy.

Looking Ahead

Democrats overperformed expectations in 2022 in large part due to the *Dobbs* decision, weak Republican challengers in key Senate races, and the composition of the midterm electorate. But this election cycle, several serious problems that were masked by the perceived success of the 2022 midterms caught up to them.

The overwhelming story of this election was inflation and the economy. 2024 was a historically bad year for incumbents, and voters' anger with rising costs due to post-pandemic inflation was directed toward the Biden-Harris administration. The economy consistently ranked as voters' No. 1 concern (by a large margin), as more than 3 in 4 voters faced rising grocery costs and voters across racial and gender lines reported worsening life conditions. Voters consistently trusted Trump more than Biden to handle inflation.

While the switch from Biden to Harris was helpful for Democrats — resulting in boosted voter enthusiasm and a closer race against Trump — Harris was not ultimately able to fully turn the tide on the economy. This was largely for two reasons.

First, she was not able to effectively distinguish herself from the Biden administration and present herself as a “change” candidate. A plurality of voters thought that Harris would continue the same policies as Biden, which was a problem because voters saw Biden as the top cause of America's economic conditions. In an election where most voters wanted “complete” or “major” change to the U.S. economic and political systems, they believed that the Republican Party would change these systems while the Democratic Party would uphold the status quo.

Second, she was not able to fully capitalize off her extremely popular economic agenda because not enough voters had heard about it. While voters overwhelmingly support Harris' plans to cap insulin costs, protect Social Security and Medicare, and lower the price of groceries, prescription drugs, and child care, most voters never heard about any of these. This problem was carried over from the Biden administration, which enacted highly popular economic policies but also struggled to make these policies visible to most voters.

Beyond the economy, Democrats struggled mightily on immigration and foreign policy, with a [surge](#) of border crossings at the end of 2023 and major international conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine damaging trust in Biden and Harris on these issues. While Democrats had some success breaking through on their stronger issues — abortion and democracy — they struggled with these issues being less important to voters, and with the fact that many voters were unsure of Trump's support for Project 2025.

Broadly, these findings indicate that the Democratic Party needs to do far more work to break through to voters — particularly those who are [politically disengaged](#) — on the economy. Democrats' economically populist agenda is overwhelmingly popular, but they need to more clearly communicate it to voters and engage in more robust communications. Earlier this year, President Biden declined the traditional pre-Super Bowl interview for the second year in a row, when 123 million Americans tuned in — [the most-watched Super Bowl in history](#). In fact, Biden will leave office [having done the fewest number of press conferences](#) among recent presidents. Even when Harris

took over the top of the ticket in July, she [waited weeks](#) before doing her first major broadcast interview in late August. Democrats need to do the basics of actively communicating their agenda to the American people, including through non-traditional media to reach disengaged voters. Voters crave authenticity and engagement, which they found in Trump.

Democrats also need to more actively demonstrate to voters that *they* are the party of change. They need to show voters that they are capable of fixing our country's immigration system and foreign conflicts by taking a [serious but humane approach](#) to border security and supporting [popular solutions](#) to conflicts abroad.

By branding itself as an active party of economic populism that fights for needed changes for the working class, the Democratic Party can put itself in a position to regain the support of the voters it lost in 2024.