

The One-Word Explanation For Trump's Stunning Victory?



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11-13-2024 ~ Corporate media pundits will not tell you, because it remains at the core of their belief system. But neoliberalism is not just an economic doctrine, but a political project that has now ushered us into the abyss of fascism.

Donald Trump's commanding victory over [Kamala Harris](#) seems to have surprised a lot of people both in the U.S. and around the world. Yet, it's not surprising that Trump pulled off this victory, especially since polls predicted a tight race. What is surprising though is the scale of his victory. In a deeply divided society with a two-party system, one would have expected that either candidate would have won by a narrow margin.

Trump's victory, which will have a wide-ranging impact on all aspects of U.S. society and will reverberate through the global political economy, represents a genuine political earthquake. He won the electoral college and the popular vote by expanding his coalition with historic demographic shifts. Even democratic heartlands saw large swings toward Trump, while Kamala Harris underperformed with both women (thus indicating that abortion was much less of a key issue than people thought it would be in the 2024 presidential election) and young voters. [Young male voters](#), in particular, swung toward Trump in a big way as Kamala Harris not only put [women on top of her agenda](#) but, in turn, had very little to say about men. As for the [loss of the working-class vote](#), which so much has already been said and written about it, suffice to say that Harris also had nothing to say to the mass of citizens facing economic hardship. Strangely enough, Harris and the Democrats in general did not even try to convey to the public some of the success

that Biden's economic policies had in contributing to growth and employment.

Kamala Harris could not convince the voters. A considerable majority of the electorate did not share her priorities. That much is obvious. Following her loss to [Donald Trump](#), Democratic National Committee finance committee member Lindy Li made a telling comment when she said that Harris' bid for the White House was a "[\\$1 billion disaster](#)."

Indeed, Democrats' humiliating losses in the 2024 elections has sparked [infighting and finger pointing](#) about what went wrong and where the party goes from here. Whether Kamala Harris was the right choice for the Democrats is now of course an academic question. But it may be of interest to see what the [New York Times](#) said about Harris in November 2019: "Ms. Harris is the only 2020 Democrat who has fallen hard out of the top tier of candidates. She has proved to be an uneven campaigner who changes her message and tactics to little effect and has a staff torn into factions."

The emerging consensus on Trump's reelection is that it was fueled by the economy. But what exactly does this mean? Between the final quarter of 2022 and the third quarter of 2024, the [U.S. economy](#) under the Biden-Harris administration was in rather good shape. Unemployment was at its lowest level in decades, wages were rising (though it's not clear at all if Americans' pay has fully recovered from inflation), and the GDP was expanding above the trend. In fact, the U.S. economy has been growing [faster](#) than any other advanced economy by a wide margin. And the inflation has steadily cooled over the past couple of years.

Now, we do know of course that there was a mismatch in U.S. economy perception and reality, and that a [Harris-Guardian](#) poll conducted in the spring of 2024 had in fact revealed that almost everything that most Americans believed about the economy was wrong. However, all this can be explained by the fact that economies are too complex to be summed up by just a couple of indicators. A person's perception of a country's economic health can be influenced by one's own economic status, pessimism about the overall direction of the economy based on comparisons about economic conditions even with the rather distant past, and sentiments about the role of government and even the public's voice in government and politics. People who feel disconnected from the political system and have dismal views about the nation's politics are not likely to express positive views about the state of the economy. In other words, perceptions about the state

of the economy can be influenced by [political biases](#).

The notion that Trump's re-election was fueled not so much by the actual state of the economy but rather by voter anxiety over the general direction of the economy and who is really in charge of government in the United States would have made more sense. [Most voters](#) don't feel economically stable or secure. They are aware of the growing economic inequalities and worry about job security. Surveys have consistently found that most workers in the U.S. can't afford an [emergency expense](#) even of a few hundred dollars. For most U.S. adults, the [American dream](#) no longer holds true, including a staggering 80 percent among people under the age of 30.

Let's call things by their proper names. It is the cumulative effects of neoliberalism on economic wellbeing, social cohesion, and democratic politics that explains the pessimism that exists in people's minds about the direction of the economy and the condition of the country overall. It is the disastrous effects of neoliberalism that can explain the latest realignment of the U.S. electorate and Trump's decisive victory over Kamala Harris. It is the dysfunctional U.S. economic system in its totality that has given rise to authoritarian demagogues like Donald Trump who promise unhappy and angry voters a return to a golden age.

The economic, political, social, and cultural dominance of neoliberalism has facilitated the rise of authoritarian populism and the far right not only in the United States but throughout the world. Here, I define neoliberalism not only as an economic doctrine primarily characterized by free markets, globalization, liberalization, massive deregulation, shifts away from social welfare programs, and the redistribution of income and wealth from labor to capital, but also as a political project that aims to undo the demos and is carried out by the dominant economic classes through a brutal form of class warfare and with the explicit aim of capturing the political system and hijacking the state as the implementation of neoliberal policies requires large-scale intervention in the capitalist economy; and, equally important, as a sociopolitical ideology that puts individual self-interest before the common good, displays indifference to economic and social inequality and subsequently justifies plutocracy, offers acceptance to unequal power distribution, and transfers responsibility to individual agents.

Neoliberalism has attained a hegemonic position as an economic doctrine and sociopolitical ideology in much of the developed world and permeates the entire

mainstream political space. Across Europe, social democratic and socialist parties have become virtually indistinguishable from conservative and right-wing political parties. In the U.S. the Carter, Clinton and Obama administrations pushed neoliberalism as the only viable alternative. Subsequently, what we have seen over the past twenty or so years across the developed capitalist world is the resurgence of ethno-nationalism, the rise of far-right political movements and political parties, and neofascist leaders like Orban in Hungary and Meloni in Italy and proto-fascists like Trump in the United States rising to power through the ballot box.

The new breed of authoritarian populists like Trump has emerged precisely because neoliberal capitalism has created so much discontent and anger that it needs a new model of governance to keep the system intact. And it comes in the form of proto-fascism or neo-fascism. Trumpism is an extreme far-right ideology that attacks democracy and seeks to disband progressive social agendas while promoting a new and more ruthless form of market liberalization. Trumpism is best defined as neoliberal fascism.

Unfortunately, as the traditional parties of the left have themselves embraced the neoliberal orthodoxy and the postmodern left has become obsessed with cultural issues and anti-racism at the expense of economic issues, a very sizeable chunk of the working class has been duped by the new breed of authoritarian populists and put its trust in turn in their hands in hopes of a better future. This is the tragedy of the Left. For without radical political leadership for guidance and inspiration, the working class of today fails to recognize neoliberal capitalism as the problem and has been made in turn to look for scapegoats. This is what Trump has managed to do with his vicious attacks on immigrants, undoubtedly more successfully than any other authoritarian demagogue in the western world.

Like their predecessors, the new breed of authoritarian demagogues with proclivities to fascist rhetoric like Trump are homogenizing nationalists. But with the U.S. being one of the most ethnically diverse and multicultural nations in the world, Trump knew he had to expand his voter base if he were to be successful in his bid for reelection. The fact that his message got through with black, Latino and Asian voters is nothing short of amazing. It seems that the more racist Donald Trump sounds, the more voters he attracts from minority groups. Indeed, the Republican Party is now less white than ever before, and that has to be a very distressing development for the future of the Democratic Party.

What the next four years will bring from the Trump administration may be unlike anything the United States has experienced in modern times. Trump feels he has a powerful mandate, which is hard to argue against, to fulfill his campaign promises. Deportations and closing the border, drilling, pardons, tariffs, targeting journalists, and signing executive orders for schools pushing “critical race theory” and “gender identity” could be among the first promises he may try to fulfill. The restructuring of the U.S. government will take time, and it is unlikely that the second Trump administration will be as disorganized and chaotic as the first.

Progressives and radicals should prepare for what lies ahead. We do live in interesting times.

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