Was the 2024 US Election Truly a Landslide Win for Donald Trump?

By Ted Siraki

SYNOPSIS

The 2024 US election was quickly described as a "landslide", a label that has more recently been impugned. Most analyses, however, have not delved into the historical context and data before 2020. Doing so reveals a broader, more nuanced picture that demonstrates the significance of Donald Trump's win and the virtual impracticability of Kamala Harris' task.

COMMENTARY

In the hours following the recent US presidential election, a narrative quickly surfaced that Trump's victory was a "landslide". Soon thereafter, a more common counternarrative emerged in the form of think pieces arguing it was anything but, with titles such as, "Why Is Everyone Calling It a Landslide?" and "Maybe Democrats Didn't Do So Badly After All".

However, pieces such as these rarely, if ever, engage with historical context or data before 2016 or even 2020. Now that the dust has settled, we can examine the results more objectively.

The 2024 election in particular provides a good example of the importance of historical and statistical context.

What Is a Landslide Victory?

There is no accepted definition, but if historical precedent is any indication, the Republicans' win was *not* a landslide; the 20th century, in comparison, was full of them. In 1972, Richard Nixon won all but one state, winning 520 out of 538 electoral votes and a popular vote share of 60.7 per cent, an 18 million vote margin. Ronald

Reagan won both the 1980 and 1984 contests by an average of 507 out of 538 electoral votes – the last candidate to break the 500-barrier – and lost only one state by a mere 0.18 per cent. In 1988, George H.W. Bush, father of G.W. Bush, won by an impressive 426 electoral votes and 53.4 per cent of the popular vote. H.W. Bush was, in fact, the last candidate of *either* party to win over 400 electoral votes.

Every subsequent election has been much closer, sometimes with the winner losing the popular vote. The only recent election that comes even close to the wallopings witnessed in the 20th century was in 2008 when Obama – the candidate of *Hope & Change* who emerged amid The Great Recession – won with 350 electoral votes and a 10 million-vote margin.

In 2024, Trump won 312 of 538 electoral votes and the plurality of the popular vote (49.9 per cent), a margin of about 2.3 million votes, down from a more flattering margin of 5 million in the days immediately following the election. As several others have noted, his popular vote share is among the lowest ever.

Was It a Decisive, Historically Meaningful Victory?

Trump is only the second Republican in the last thirty years to win the popular vote – G.W. Bush did so in 2004 but not in 2000 – as well as the first candidate in 132 years to win a non-consecutive term. His tally of 31 states with 312 electoral votes is the most impressive of any Republican candidate since Bush Senior in 1988.

Trump made historic gains among certain demographics this year. He won the highest share of black voters (16 per cent) of any recent Republican candidate, which does not sound impressive until we consider that the last Republican to come close was Ronald Reagan in 1980 (14 per cent). Only Richard Nixon, all the way back in 1960 – four years before the Civil Rights Act was passed – had a more impressive share at 32 per cent.

The disaggregated numbers are even more revealing: Trump doubled his share of *black males* since 2020 from 12 per cent to 24 per cent.

Trump may have won the greatest share of Latino voters of any Republican candidate ever. His share increased from 29 per cent in 2016 to 46 per cent in 2024, with up to 54 per cent of Hispanic men casting their ballots for Trump.

Some Blue States Less Blue Now

As several commentators have already noted, Trump lost otherwise Democrat states by the narrowest margins in decades. New Jersey, which has consistently voted Democrat since 1992, was decided by the smallest margin since Bill Clinton won the state narrowly that same year – 250,000 out of 4.2 million votes cast – the worst take, in other words, for a Democrat when the state had been in their hands since World War II. New York State, a Democrat stronghold, went for Kamala Harris by 11.6 points, the worst result for a Democrat since the 1980s.

Some Red States More Red Now

Few have noted that Trump easily won Florida by 13 points, an improvement over the two previous contests when he won the state by 3 to 4 points. The last time *any* candidate won the state by double digits was H.W. Bush in 1988 when he won by 22 points.

Likewise, on the Saturday before election eve, a "bombshell" poll had Harris winning Iowa, a Republican bastion, by 3 points. What actually happened? Trump won the state by over 13 points. This was, again, an improvement from the two previous elections when he won the state by 8 to 10 points. Even G.W. Bush won the state in 2004 by a mere 0.7 per cent. In fact, the last candidate of *any* party to come close to Trump's share this year was Reagan in 1980, when he won the state by 12.7 points, while H.W. Bush actually *lost* the state in 1988 by 10 points. In short, the poll was spectacularly and historically wrong.

Do Sitting Vice Presidents Ever Win?

The post-mortems of the Harris campaign will doubtless continue for months, if not years, to come. Despite this, there is one final contextual note in favour of Kamala Harris: *she was asked to do the impossible*. Sitting vice presidents rarely win. In fact, since 1836, only George H.W. Bush, in 1988, accomplished this feat in a victory that followed an extraordinarily popular Reagan presidency that enjoyed approval ratings as high as 63 per cent before election eve.

By contrast, Al Gore in 2000, Hubert Humphrey in 1968, and Richard Nixon in 1960 were all sitting vice presidents who failed to get elected president, and this despite serving under very popular presidents. Dwight Eisenhower, Nixon's president, had approval ratings as high as 79 per cent while Bill Clinton had a final approval rating averaging 63 per cent in 2000.

Rightly or wrongly, Joe Biden is historically unpopular: he had a 36 per cent approval rating in July 2024, which went up to 41 per cent only *after* he decided to step down. In short, Harris is in very good vice president company but arguably had an even bigger task as Biden did not drop out until 108 days before election day, an unprecedented move – even Lyndon B. Johnson stepped down eight months before the 1968 election. Despite that, it is worth pointing out that Harris received over 74.9 million votes, the most of any previous candidate not named Biden. Her total eclipses that of Hilary Clinton (65.8 million), Obama in 2008 (69.5 million) and even Trump in 2020 (74.2 million).

Digging into the data shows us that the 2024 election was not a landslide win for the Republicans, but it does signal a clear victory for Trump. The data also show us the magnitude of Harris' task alongside Trump's historically meaningful gains among certain demographics and regions.

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