

The Democratic Party continues to misread America

di Ramesh Ponnuru

High inflation harmed the Democratic Party more than any other issue in 2024. In a [just-released report](#) for the Democratic National Committee on that year's election campaign, the word "inflation" comes up 18 times. But every time, it is in the context of adjusting previous years' campaign spending for inflation so that the numbers can be compared with 2024 outlays. The ruinous price increases that took place during the Biden-Harris administration do not get a mention.

That's the report, instantly dubbed [an autopsy](#), in a nutshell: nearly 200 pages obsessed with how Democrats spent money — not enough on strengthening state parties or digital ads, according to the report — and entirely uninterested in the issues that came between the party and a majority of voters.

There's nothing about President Joe Biden's age and voters' worries about it. Nothing about the border crisis the Democrats first caused through their policies and then denied in their rhetoric. Nothing about the party's declining appeal to religiously observant voters. Nothing about the boutique left-wing views — such as support for [taxpayer-funded sex changes](#) for illegal immigrants and prisoners — that Vice President Kamala Harris had endorsed a few years before the Democratic presidential nomination fell into her lap. Nothing, even, about the unpopularity of the administration and Harris's inability to explain how she would do any better if elected.

Instead, the autopsy dwells on such matters as how well Democratic campaigns used text messages to contact voters. The report says they use texts too much for fundraising and not enough for persuasion. But the bigger problem is that the Democrats didn't have much persuasive to say to voters in the first place.

The release of the report was a drawn-out debacle that lasted longer than the Harris campaign itself. The head of the DNC, Ken Martin, commissioned the report but kept

it on ice, explaining that he wanted to look forward instead, especially after Democrats did well in elections last fall. Speculation about his motives for concealing the autopsy predictably grew. Eventually, CNN got enough of the report that he was forced to publish it, along with a statement disavowing it as not “ready for primetime.” Now there are calls for Martin to resign.

Maybe he should. But his departure would do nothing to keep his party from repeating its costly mistakes. A few Democrats have tried to take insights from their defeats. Last year, the center-left group Welcome [issued its own report](#), which grappled with voters’ perception that Democrats have different priorities than they do: “In comparison with the Democratic Party of 2012, today’s Democratic Party is more focused on issues like climate change, democracy, abortion, and identity and cultural concerns and less focused on the economy and the middle class.”

In general, though, Democrats are not engaging in such painful reflection. They could be making it clear that they want to enforce immigration laws while avoiding President Donald Trump’s excesses. Instead, the Democrats who are most outspoken about immigration are talking, again, about [abolishing enforcement agencies](#). Democratic candidates are sticking with positions that voters don’t share — such as letting people with XY chromosomes compete in women’s sports — while trying to tell voters they [shouldn’t care](#) about those issues.

The party may even repeat the mistake of nominating Harris. She has a strong cheering section. But she also has the policy views and political instincts of someone who came up in a one-party state, which helps to explain how she lost all seven swing states in 2024.

The Democrats’ complacency might not matter much in the short term. Trump’s unpopularity and the outrage of his opponents may lead them to victories in this year’s midterm elections. But the electorate of 2028 will be larger, and different, from the electorate this coming fall, and voters approach presidential elections differently from midterms: It’s tapping the brakes versus giving someone the wheel.

Democrats let midterm wins mislead them just four years ago. They outperformed expectations in 2022 because Republicans ran many candidates voters found unacceptable. That muffled Democratic concerns about Biden’s age and about the

damage uncontrolled inflation and immigration were doing to the party's reputation. Winning the midterms this year could have a similar effect, weakening any remaining reformist impulse.

The Democrats aren't just failing to learn from what happened in 2024, in other words. They're taking the wrong lessons from what's happening right now.