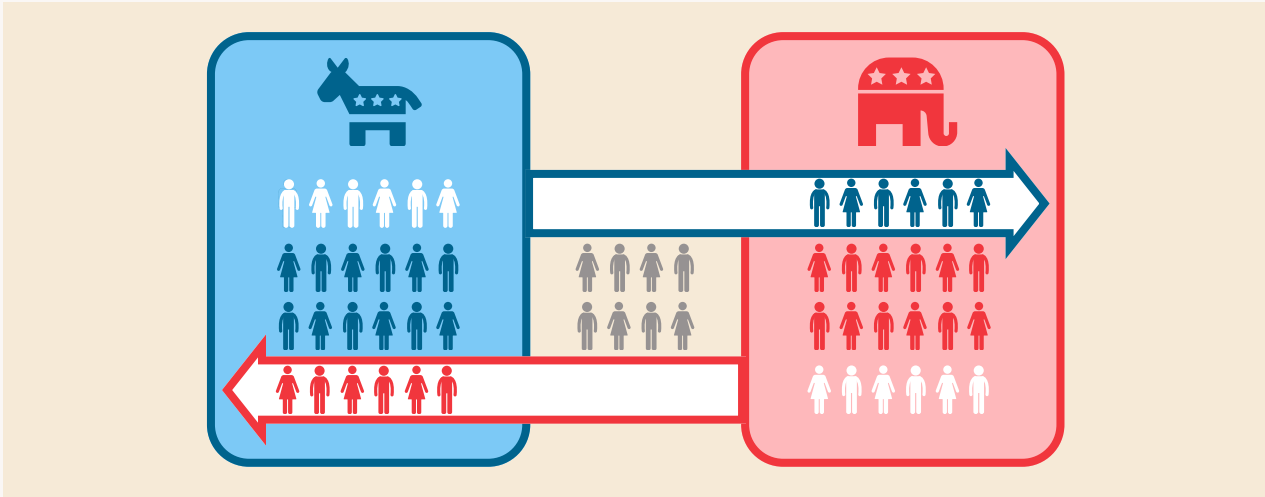


2024 Presidential Election: Electoral Systems

Q) Was there a realignment in 2024?

Edexcel: 5.2.3 Coalition of supporters for each party

AQA: 3.2.1.5 The electoral process and direct democracy

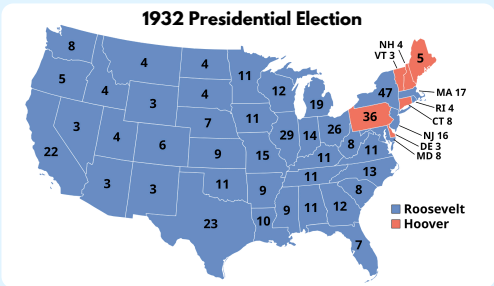


What is a political realignment?

A political realignment occurs when there is a significant and lasting change in the voting behaviour of different demographic groups, leaving the Democratic and Republican parties with new coalitions of voters. Realignments have historically followed major social, economic, or political upheavals and have often resulted in dramatic changes in election outcomes, with one party gaining dominance having built a new, broader coalition of supporters. They can lead to the emergence of a new party system, where the priorities and alliances that define political competition are fundamentally reshaped. The 20th Century saw several important realignments:

New Deal Realignment (1932):

Trigger: The Great Depression, which created widespread economic hardship, resulted in a new diverse Democratic coalition that was united by a shared preference for greater state intervention to address unemployment, poverty, and economic instability.

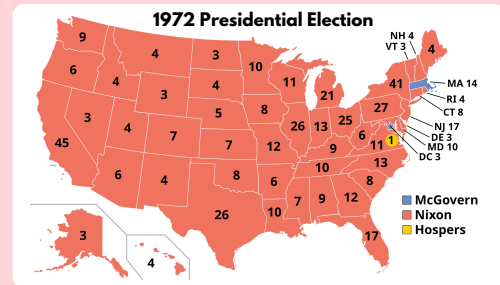
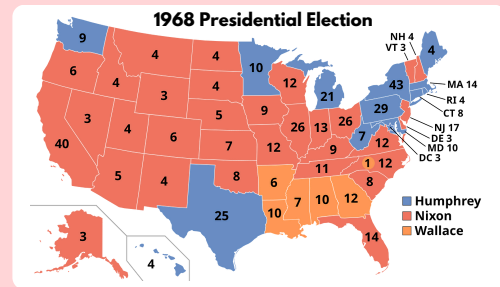


Democratic Coalition	Republican Coalition
Working class voters	Middle & upper class voters
Low-income individuals	Wealthier individuals and professionals
Trade unions & blue-collar workers	Business owners & corporate interests
Southern white farmers & labourers	Prosperous farmers
Racial and religious minorities	Northern, white Protestants

Southern Realignment (1960s):

Trigger: The Civil Rights Movement and the social upheavals of the 1960s fractured the Democratic coalition - some white Southern voters, alienated by the party's support for civil rights, began voting Republican.

Richard Nixon's "Southern Strategy" aimed to win over disaffected Democrats through an emphasis on states' rights, law and order, and opposition to forced desegregation. The resulting Republican coalition was united by a shared opposition to the rapid social changes of the era, including the expansion of federal power and liberal cultural values.

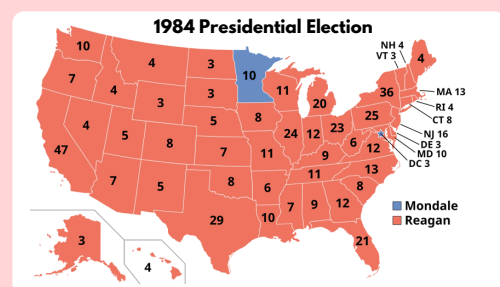
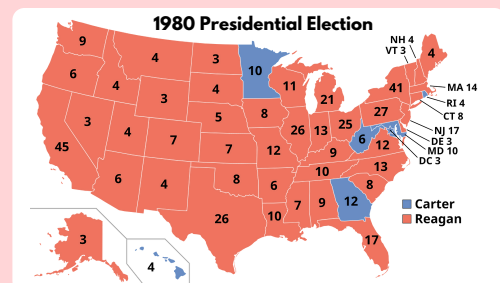


Democratic Coalition	Republican Coalition
Northern urban voters	Southern white voters
African-American voters	Conservative white protestants
Trade unions	Business interests
Northern Catholic and Jewish voters	Suburban middle-class voters
Young, college-educated voters	Rural and small-town voters

Reagan Realignment (1980s):

Trigger: The economic turmoil of the 1970s, marked by high inflation & unemployment (stagflation), and a perceived failure of state intervention, alongside growing cultural tensions over issues like abortion, continued to reshape the two party coalitions.

Ronald Reagan united suburban & Southern white voters, evangelical Christians, and disillusioned blue-collar Democrats, with the promise to: revitalise the economy with tax cuts & deregulation; reinstate traditional cultural values; and restore national pride by adopting a more assertive foreign policy.



Democratic Coalition	Republican Coalition
Urban working-class voters	Suburban, middle-class voters
Ethnic minority voters	White working-class 'Reagan Democrats'
Trade unions	Business interests & fiscal conservatives
Liberal intellectuals and academics	Evangelical Christians, religious conservatives
Northeast and West Coast states	Southern, Midwestern, and Sunbelt states

How has voting behaviour changed in recent elections?

	2016 Trump	2020 Trump	2024 Trump	2016 Clinton	2020 Biden	2024 Harris
Education, race and gender						
White women, college degree	44%	45%	41%	51%	54%	58%
White women, no degree	61%	63%	63%	34%	36%	35%
White men, college degree	53%	51%	50%	39%	48%	48%
White men, no degree	71%	70%	69%	23%	28%	29%
Voters of colour, college degree	22%	27%	32%	72%	70%	65%
Voters of colour, no degree	20%	26%	34%	76%	72%	64%
Race/ethnicity and gender						
White men	62%	61%	60%	31%	38%	38%
White women	52%	55%	53%	43%	44%	46%
Black men	13%	19%	21%	82%	79%	77%
Black women	4%	9%	7%	94%	90%	92%
Latino men	32%	36%	54%	63%	59%	44%
Latina women	25%	30%	39%	69%	69%	58%
All other races	31%	38%	47%	61%	58%	49%
Rural, suburban and urban						
Urban	34%	38%	38%	60%	60%	60%
Suburban	49%	48%	51%	45%	50%	47%
Rural	61%	57%	64%	34%	42%	34%
Age						
18-29	36%	36%	43%	55%	60%	54%
30-44	41%	46%	47%	51%	52%	51%
45-64	52%	50%	54%	44%	49%	44%
65 or over	52%	52%	50%	45%	47%	49%
Religion						
Protestant / other Christian	56%	60%	63%	39%	39%	36%
Catholic	50%	47%	59%	46%	52%	39%
Jewish	23%	n/a	22%	71%	n/a	78%
Other religious affiliation	29%	29%	34%	62%	69%	61%
No religious affiliation	25%	31%	27%	67%	65%	71%

	2016 Trump	2020 Trump	2024 Trump	2016 Clinton	2020 Biden	2024 Harris
White born-again or evangelical christian?						
Yes	80%	76%	82%	16%	24%	17%
No	34%	36%	40%	60%	62%	58%
Income						
Under \$50,000	41%	44%	50%	53%	55%	48%
\$50k - \$99,999	49%	42%	52%	46%	57%	46%
\$100k or more	47%	54%	47%	47%	42%	51%
Ideology						
Liberal	10%	10%	7%	84%	89%	91%
Moderate	40%	34%	40%	52%	64%	58%
Conservative	81%	85%	90%	16%	14%	9%
Party Identification						
Democrat	8%	5%	4%	89%	94%	95%
Republican	88%	94%	94%	8%	6%	5%
Independent	46%	41%	46%	42%	54%	49%
Union Household?						
Yes	42%	40%	45%	51%	56%	53%
No	48%	49%	51%	46%	50%	47%
First time voter?						
Yes	38%	32%	55%	57%	64%	44%
No	47%	49%	49%	47%	49%	49%
Gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?						
Yes	14%	27%	12%	77%	64%	86%
No	47%	48%	53%	47%	51%	45%
Gender by marital status						
Married men	57%	55%	60%	38%	44%	38%
Married women	47%	51%	52%	49%	47%	47%
Unmarried men	44%	45%	48%	46%	52%	48%
Unmarried women	32%	36%	38%	63%	63%	61%

Source: CCN Exit Polls

Do the exit polls show signs of a new realignment?

In his 2024 victory speech, Donald Trump claimed that a “historic realignment” had taken place. While some argued that his victory lacked the sweeping scope of past realignments, like Roosevelt’s victory in 1932, CNN’s exit polls from 2016, 2020, and 2024 suggest that a significant change may be underway. This emerging realignment appears to be largely driven by education, and the clashing economic interests and social values of college graduates and working-class voters without college degrees.

Education	Democratic candidates have won increasing majorities of college graduates for three consecutive elections (52%, 55%, 56%). Meanwhile, Trump has received increasing support from voters without college degrees - from 51% of in 2016, to 55% in 2024.
Race and education	In 2016, the education gap was clearest amongst white voters - Trump won 66% of white and 20% of ethnic minority voters without degrees. However, in 2024, Trump’s support from ethnic minority voters without degrees rose sharply to 34%.
Gender and education	The education gap is also particularly pronounced between white, female graduates, who have increasingly voted Democrat (51%, 54%, 58%), and white, male non-graduates, who have consistently voted for Trump by large majorities of around 70%.
Income	In 2016, Hillary Clinton won 53% of voters earning under \$50k, while Trump won amongst higher earners. But the situation was reversed in 2024 - Trump won a majority of voters earning under \$100k, while Harris won a majority of voters earning over \$100k.
Race and gender	While 21% of <i>all</i> ethnic minority voters supported Trump in 2016, this figure rose to 33% in 2024. The change was particularly pronounced amongst Hispanic men (from 34% in 2016 to 54% in 2024) and Black men (from 13% in 2016, to 21% in 2024).

2024 Democratic Coalition	2024 Republican Coalition
College graduates (increasing)	Non-graduates (increasing)
Ethnic minority voters (declining)	White voters (but increasingly diverse)
Income over \$100,000 (increasing)	Income under \$100,000 (increasing)
LGBTQ+ voters	Evangelical Christians
Jewish, other/no religious affiliation	Protestant & Catholic voters
Urban voters	Rural voters

What could explain this potential realignment?

1. Effects of globalisation

Globalisation has reshaped the U.S. economy, creating a divide between those who have thrived in an increasingly globalised, knowledge-driven economy and those who feel left behind. Graduates, particularly in urban areas, have largely benefited from the transformation. Sectors such as technology, finance, and healthcare have expanded, offering well-paying jobs that reward education and specialised skills. For many graduates, the challenges they face now are less about economic survival and more about navigating rising living costs, particularly housing costs in cities, along with the burden of student debt. Some also struggle with 'underemployment', working in jobs that do not match their qualifications.

In contrast, the benefits of globalisation have been far more limited for non-graduates, particularly in rural and industrial regions. As manufacturing jobs have been outsourced or replaced by automation, many communities have seen a decline in economic opportunities. Non-graduates often face stagnant wages and limited career prospects, and their concerns are centred on more immediate needs, from unemployment and poverty to the rising cost of everyday essentials.

2. Materialist / post-materialist value divide

Graduates, who tend to earn more and feel more secure, often prioritise 'post-materialist values', such as individual freedom, self-expression, social justice, environmental protection, tolerance toward different identities and lifestyles and less rigid national borders. In contrast, non-graduates, whose lives may be shaped by more precarious economic conditions, often place greater emphasis on 'materialist/survival values' that stress the importance of economic and physical security, respect for authority, religion, national pride and traditional social values.

This cultural division is not solely driven by income and financial stability - if it were, wealth alone would be a clearer indicator of values and voting behaviour. Instead, the act of attending university appears to play a significant role. Graduates are often exposed to progressive ideas through discussions with liberal professors and peers, and many move to diverse, urban areas where such values are more prominent. Upon graduation, many enter professions, and engage with progressive media and social media platforms, where graduates are strongly represented, further reinforcing and amplifying their progressive social views.

Likewise, non-graduates, regardless of income, can retain more materialist values because their life experiences often centre around more traditional communities and industries, where economic security and cultural stability are everyday concerns. In a media landscape of partisan news channels, podcasts, and social media algorithms that can prioritise content to align with a user's beliefs, non-graduates are equally able to consume media that reinforces their distinct values.

3. Political party strategies

The main parties have also played a role by adopting policies that appeal to voters on one side of the 'diploma divide', while alienating supporters on the other. In 2016, Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer memorably argued that "for every blue-collar Democrat" the party might lose in western Pennsylvania - a key 'Rust Belt' region that has experienced significant industrial decline - he was confident that the party would "pick up two moderate Republicans in the suburbs" - graduates who would be drawn to the Democrats' more progressive policies on issues such as climate action, student loan forgiveness, and abortion.



President Biden's rules forcing car manufacturers to cut back their production of petrol/diesel cars might appeal to graduates concerned about climate change...

...but they also threaten blue collar auto workers, who may prefer Trump's approach of placing tariffs (taxes) on imported cars, with the aim of boosting domestic sales & jobs



President Biden's student loan forgiveness plan might appeal to graduates burdened by debt, who see it as a means to reduce inequality and expand economic opportunity...

...but many non-graduates consider the policy to be unfair & cite Trump's argument that it transfers the debt to those who didn't attend college or who have already repaid their loans

Conversely, the Republican Party under Donald Trump - who celebrated a 2016 primary victory by declaring, "I love the poorly educated" - has adopted policies aimed at winning over disaffected working-class Democrats. However, these same policies have alienated some traditional Republican voters. Trump's "America First" agenda, with its more isolationist foreign policy and skepticism of free trade, has unsettled some Reagan-era Republicans who supported the party's commitment to global free trade and its strong, interventionist approach to global affairs.



Trump's promise to mass deport illegal immigrants may appeal to workers who believe that rising illegal immigration has depressed wages and strained public services...

...but it may alienate many graduates, and others with progressive social views, who consider the policy inhumane and warn of its economic & social costs



Trump's plan to place tariffs on imported goods might appeal to workers hoping to protect jobs in traditional industries and reduce reliance on foreign competitors...

...but it may deter support from some graduates & business-minded Republicans who view free trade as key to innovation, global cooperation, and lower prices

Can the diploma divide be seen in 2024's top issues?

Percentage of registered voters who say each is very important to their vote in 2024:			
	Harris supporters	Trump supporters	% All voters
Economy	68%	93%	81%
Health care	76%	55%	65%
Supreme Court appointments	73%	54%	63%
Foreign policy	54%	70%	62%
Violent crime	46%	76%	61%
Immigration	39%	82%	61%
Gun policy	59%	53%	56%
Abortion	67%	35%	51%
Racial & ethnic inequality	56%	18%	37%
Climate change	62%	11%	37%


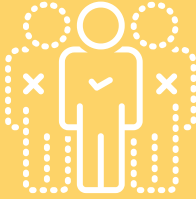

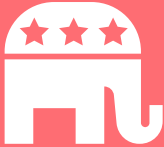


Source: Pew Research

Polls found a clear difference in the issues most commonly cited by Trump and Harris voters - a divide that links quite strongly to materialist and post-materialist values.

Trump's increasingly racially diverse and working class coalition was united by a shared focus on more materialist concerns, including the economy (93%), immigration (82%), and violent crime (76%). Of the 22% of voters who said that inflation had caused them 'severe hardship' (prices rose by 20% during Biden's term), 76% voted for Trump. Many of these voters blamed the Biden/Harris administration's policies - such as increased government spending - for contributing to inflation and rising costs. Harris also faced criticism for overseeing the largest immigration surge in U.S. history. Net migration averaged 2.4 million annually between 2021 and 2023, with around 60% of these arrivals unauthorised - a trend Trump attributed to the Biden administration's reversal of his stricter border policies. After a 2024 Department of Justice survey found an increase in violent crime, Trump and his supporters also argued that the Democrats' progressive police reforms had reduced law enforcement effectiveness.

In contrast, Harris's coalition of graduates and non-graduates cited a broader range of concerns. While many still referenced the economy (62%), more post-materialist concerns, like abortion (67%) and climate change (62%), were equally important. It was affordable health care (76%) and the desire for more progressive Supreme Court appointments (73%) that emerged as the top Democratic issues. Of the 22% of voters who said that inflation had caused them 'no hardship' over the previous four years, 78% voted for Harris, signalling that a larger portion of her coalition was less focused on immediate economic struggles and more engaged with other progressive issues.

Are realignment claims being overstated?

	<p>The economy: Incumbent governments across the world have been voted out due to anger over COVID-related inflation. Were Trump's electoral gains the result of a long-term realignment or a short-term reaction to current economic conditions? If Trump fails to deliver clear economic improvements, will the newest members of his coalition return to the Democrats, or stay at home in 2028?</p>
	<p>Differential turnout: While Trump expanded his coalition in 2024 (he won 3m more votes than in 2020, and 14m more than in 2016), his victory also owed much to the fact that an even larger number of voters chose not to realign, but to simply stay at home in 2024 - Harris won over 6m fewer votes than Biden in 2020. Will a different Democratic candidate bring these non-voters back in 2028?</p>
	<p>Popular vote: Realignments are often associated with sweeping electoral victories, and the consolidation of power for many years. While the Republicans have secured control of the White House, House and Senate, Trump's popular vote margin was only 1.5%, and Republicans have only narrow majorities in Congress. A very small vote change could deliver a totally different outcome in 2026/28.</p>
	<p>Trump's candidacy: Much of the perceived realignment could be attributed to Trump's personal appeal & unique political persona. There was an increase in split-ticket voting in 2024. Trump won Arizona, Michigan, Nevada & Wisconsin - states that also elected Democratic Senators. Are these voters gradually becoming Republicans, or did they split their ticket for Trump specifically?</p>
	<p>Harris's candidacy: Harris became the candidate only after Biden withdrew in July, leaving her less time to campaign. As VP she faced criticism over rising inflation & immigration, but she also chose not to distance herself from Biden's policies, telling one TV interviewer that she wouldn't have done anything differently. Would a different, primary winning, candidate, have fared better?</p>
	<p>Overall: Realignments often unfold gradually, and the 2024 election might just be another step in a process that began decades ago. The growing education divide, and the movement of working-class voters to the Republican Party and college-educated voters to the Democrats, has been developing for many years. It remains to be seen whether, in a very closely divided country, this realignment can produce a stable and dominant coalition.</p>