Run with Ralph

Strategies for Candidates, Campaigns, and Changemakers

Top 10 Lessons for Democrats from the 2024 Elections

1. **Competence frames stick early.** Once a "weak/chaotic" narrative sets in, it's hard to dislodge. President Biden's poll numbers dropped after the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal and never recovered.
2. **On the border, speed matters.** If you wait, the issue spirals and the opposition defines it for you. Biden did too little, too late to secure the borders.
3. **Pair long-term policy with fast, felt benefits.** "Big wins" don't help electorally unless voters can feel them in time. Biden's legislative accomplishments were incredible, but many voters didn't feel changes in daily life before the election.
4. **Trust is an asset—don't create a broken-promise storyline.** If voters think you implied one thing and did another, you start in a hole. Biden signaled he would be a "transition president," then ran for reelection anyway.
5. **Never argue with voters' lived economy.** Validate cost pressure first; then show concrete relief. Arguing macroeconomic statistics over voters' lived experience is a losing strategy.
6. **A real primary is a stress test, not a luxury.** It sharpens the messenger and the message—and prevents late-cycle improvisation. Harris ran a remarkable campaign under the circumstances, but it wasn't pressure-tested by a primary.
7. **Match your tone to the country's mood.** If voters feel stress, anger, or anxiety, a "joy" theme can read as out of touch. Harris is a naturally sunny person, and her vibe didn't match the moment—another argument for the value of a primary.
8. **The change candidate usually wins—so create daylight from the status quo.** Plan a clear "here's what I'd do differently" answer early. Harris failed to identify meaningful differences with Biden.
9. **Don't leave a high-salience attack unanswered.** Rapid rebuttal and reframing beat silence that lets a narrative hang. Trump's prisoner gender-surgery ad was devastating, and the Harris campaign didn't push back effectively—despite reporting that gender-affirming surgeries in the federal prison system were extremely rare (two inmates).
10. **Lead with working-class economics early and consistently.** Don't muddle it with donor-safe triangulation; voters reward clear alignment with working families. Harris emphasized issues like raising the minimum wage too late to be maximally effective.

Explore Run with Ralph's **Affordability and Opportunity Agenda** for practical proposals to meet people's needs, **The Governing Majority** for how to build and sustain the democratic power to deliver them, and **Playbooks** for ways to put these ideas into practice in your own work and community.