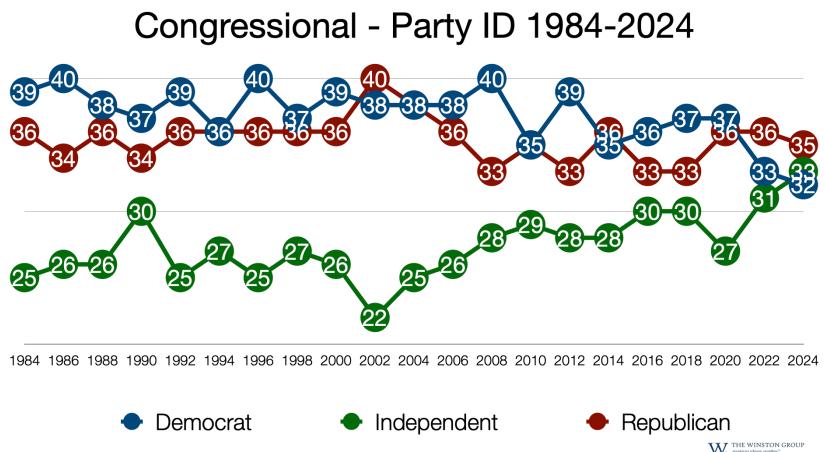


Obama Tells Democrats To Toughen Up. Is That Enough?

Former President Obama has told Democrats to “toughen up” for the next election, according to a report by [The Hill](#). “I think it’s going to require a little bit less navel-gazing and a little less whining and being in fetal positions. And it’s going to require Democrats to just toughen up.” His advice sounds like doubling down on the status quo and focusing on campaign mechanics. It is understandable he wants to rally the troops, but the problems for Democrats run much deeper than morale. Here are three reasons why Democrats need more than toughness:

1.) Different political universe for Democrats. Compared to the Obama years, the political universe for Democrats is very different. We have pointed out before that in 2024, Democrats were a third party nationally and in 5 of the 7 competitive states, coming in behind Republicans and independents as a percentage of the presidential electorate. ([see our analysis here](#)) In Obama’s 2008 historic win, Democrats had a 7-point party ID advantage over Republicans (Congressional level party ID: 40% D, 33% R, 28% independent). That advantage continued in his 2012 re-election (+6D). By 2024, Democrats fell to 32% of the electorate behind Republicans (35%) and independents (33%), their lowest point in the history of exit polls. This gave Republicans a +3 party ID advantage at the House level — a very different political reality than what Obama faced.



2) Run to the left or center? The Hill article also quoted Obama calling out “progressives, liberals ...who seem like they’re kind of cowed and intimidated and shrinking away from just asserting what they believe.” In the 2024 electorate, 16% of the electorate considered themselves to be liberal Democrats. Progressives are free to assert their views, but they represent only 16% of the country.

Additionally, the Democratic Party has no consensus as to whether to move to the left or the center. The new progressive star in New York — Zohran Mamdani — is promoting far-left policies like government-run grocery stores. On the other hand, DSCC Chair Kirsten Gillibrand says she wants to recreate the 2006 playbook to recruit centrist candidates in states like North Carolina. This clash of political strategies is going to cause chaos within the party.

3) Wrong strategy. Obama disparages “navel gazing” but doesn’t urge Democrats to rethink their strategies. Democrats have not reached a consensus on reasons they lost in the last election and blew a billion dollar campaign war chest. Despite running on an abortion message, [Harris's margin among women](#) was much smaller (8) than Biden’s 2020 margin (15) and Hillary Clinton’s in 2016 (13). The campaign emphasis on “threats to democracy” was [equally as ineffective](#).

Democrats can toughen up and focus on process, but their real problem for winning elections is that there simply aren’t enough of them. Without a course correction of the strategy and plan to regrow the party, their losing streak will continue.

Have a good weekend.

David & Myra