

## Candidate 5 evidence

### Evidence sheet

Harris stated Americans ready to 'turn the page':

<https://time.com/7016386/kamala-harris-tim-walz-cnn-interview/>

later said 'there is not a thing' different Biden:

<https://www.axios.com/2024/10/08/harris-biden-view-abc-2024-differences>

66% Americans aged 18-24 associate with Democrat party, 34% of with republicans. Equally, 32-point advantage 25-29 democrats:

[https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/age-generational-cohorts-and-party-identification/pp\\_2024-4-9\\_partisan-coalitions\\_4-01-png/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/04/09/age-generational-cohorts-and-party-identification/pp_2024-4-9_partisan-coalitions_4-01-png/)

BBC, Harris 'light on policy':

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cged20l3nq8o>

81% of Americans felt economy 'very important' to vote:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/09/09/issues-and-the-2024-election/>

2020, Biden. 5% support came from Republicans:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/>

WSJ poll, Trump favourability at 47% July 25<sup>th</sup>, after shooting. Up 9 points on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. Highest since started polling in November 2021:

[https://prod-i.a.dj.com/public/resources/documents/WSJ\\_Poll\\_LateJuly\\_2024.pdf](https://prod-i.a.dj.com/public/resources/documents/WSJ_Poll_LateJuly_2024.pdf)

Trump got 85% negative coverage on major networks, NBC, CBS and ABC. 78% positive coverage for Harris:

<https://www.livemint.com/news/us-news/us-elections-2024-imbalance-in-coverage-of-donald-trump-kamala-harris-says-report-11730245917911.html>

Roe vs Wade overturned, Restricted abortion in 19 states:

<https://edition.cnn.com/us/abortion-access-restrictions-bans-us-dg/index.html>

### Did Kamala Harris lose, or did Donald Trump lose the 2024 US Presidential election?

The 2024 US Presidential election took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2024 between former Republican President Donald Trump and then incumbent Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. Initially, Trump was set for a rematch with his 2020 election rival, President Joe Biden. However, a disastrous debate performance in late June 2024 created serious doubts about the electability and viability of Biden's campaign. Following Biden's debate catastrophe, pressure mounted within the democratic party that ultimately led him to drop his bid for a second term as president on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2024. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, Joe Biden's Vice President Kamala Harris was nominated as the new democratic party nominee unopposed, with just 107 days until Americans were set to vote. After a chaotic election cycle for both parties, Trump ultimately came out on top, securing a decisive 312 electoral college votes to Harris' 226. Alongside this, Trump also secured a sweep of all 7 battleground states and scored a popular vote victory, the first republican to do so since President George W Bush in 2004. Many would argue that the responsibility for the election result lies solely with VP Harris herself, a weak nominee whose campaign failed to adequately address the issues faced by ordinary Americans. However, many others would argue it was Trump, and his campaign that emotionally and practically connected with voters who secured the result. This question is of clear importance as we see its impacts taking effect in America, and globally just months on from election day. In Washington, congressional Republicans, cowed by Trump's insurmountable authority enact the President's radical MAGA agenda at break-neck speed. In just 2 months, President Trump has already withdrawn, then reinstated military aid to Ukraine, cut the size of government departments and overseen sweeping deportations of illegal immigrants. On the other hand, Democrats continue to wallow in defeat, rudderless after yet another crushing blow to their already beleaguered party.

On the one hand, many would argue it was Harris' candidacy and leadership that ultimately sealed her fate in the 2024 election. Harris became the nominee on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2024, succeeding President Biden, under whom she had served as Vice President for 4 years. Despite her incumbency, Harris chose to run a campaign focused on change, stating in a CNN interview that Americans were ready to 'turn the page'. The VP contradicted herself however, when in a later media appearance, she said 'there is not a thing 'she would've done differently to Biden during his tenure. This contradiction created questions about her honesty and credibility. Furthermore, it meant that Harris both failed to cut herself loose from the Biden administration's failures, while forgoing any right to claim credit for its successes. This links to the rational choice voting model which suggests that voters make decisions based on which party or candidate best

aligns with their self-interest. In this context, Harris' attempts to distance herself from Biden may have appeared especially contradictory to those voters who associated Biden's successes with policies that aligned with their best interest. Harris also inadvertently created questions about her own reliability and trustworthiness, which may have made it difficult to secure the votes of those seeking reliable and consistent leadership. Furthermore, Harris only took part in her first solo media interview on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2024, nearly 2 full months since she took on the role of Democratic nominee. This meant that she had much less direct exposure to the public through interviews than her opponent, Trump. Thus, Trump was able to create harmful narratives about Harris being overly progressive and unqualified without direct rebuttal from Harris herself on TV. Kamala Harris made waves as the first black woman to become the Vice President of the US. She also was the first black woman to head the presidential ticket of a major party in America. This instantly made Harris a symbol of social progress and equality. However, this may have alienated racist/ and or misogynistic voters who did not want to elect a black woman through no fault of her own. This is compounded by the successes of Biden in 2020, and a slew of congressional democrats in 2020, 2022 and 2024 who all won elections running on the democratic party brand. This proved that the democratic party was not the problem for many voters, but her identity may have been. When Biden dropped his bid for a second term on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2024, it was unclear what would happen next. In a rare act of unity by the democratic party, they nominated his obvious successor, Vice President Kamala Harris unopposed just days later on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2024. This lack of a competitive primary may have deprived Harris of a vital opportunity to soundboard and water-proof campaign messages and policies with the voting public before the general election in November. Furthermore, it led to Harris having less legitimacy than Biden, who had been elected democratic nominee in the 2024 primary. This resulted in Harris commanding less loyalty within the democratic party but also resulted in discontent with many voters who wished to vote for Biden but no longer could. Many of these voters would go on to support Trump or not vote at all. Harris spent lots of time and money on social media campaigns on platforms such as TikTok to win over the youth vote. However, this may have been a redundant exercise as young people were already more likely than not to vote for democrats anyway, as evidenced by a 2023 poll showing a massive 66% of Americans aged 18-24 associate with the Democratic party, compared to just 33% who associate with Republicans. In addition, the Democrats commanded a similar 32-point lead with voters aged 25-29 in this same survey. Therefore, Harris should have spent more time courting older voters who were more likely to support Trump. A similar trend can be seen in the UK general election of 2024, wherein older voters were more likely to vote for parties of the right, such as the Conservatives, and younger people more likely to vote for parties of the left, such as Labour.

It should be noted that many believe it was not Harris' leadership, but her policies that led to her defeat. The BBC described the Harris campaign as 'light on policy', a reflection of the vibes based, vagueness of her campaign on policy issues. Her and her team only frequently discussed few policies in detail; such as the introduction of a child tax credit, the reestablishment of national abortion rights and tax hikes on big business. This vagueness allowed Harris to be something to everyone, meaning she did not alienate voter groups on specific, individual policies. It also meant that she could talk about grander, bipartisan issues such as progress, democracy and unity which could appeal to a broad spectrum of voters, regardless of political identification. However, this vagueness also did little to quell the concerns of voters at a time when 81% of Americans felt that the economy was 'very important' in deciding how they would vote. Furthermore, it also resulted in Harris failing to make a compelling vision of what her America would look like, while also meaning that many voters could not decipher if she was in their best interest simply because they did not have the information to do so, which according to the rational choice model was a big hinderance on her electability. Harris also ran a relatively conservative campaign, supporting right wing policies such as fracking, strict immigration rules and support for Israel over Palestine, alongside campaigning prominently with Republican heavyweight, and GOP former Vice President's daughter, Liz Cheney. This alienated progressives, who wished to see the VP take principled left-wing positions on the issues which she never did. Ultimately, Harris' gambit for disaffected Republicans would also prove ineffective, as she did no better than Biden did in 2020 with Republicans, with 5% of both candidates support in the 2020, and 2024 elections respectively coming from Republicans.

On the other hand, many would argue it was Trump's leadership and candidacy which resulted in his victory. By 2024, Trump had already served as President previously, making him a familiar figure in an increasingly uncertain world. Like him or loathe him, with Trump voters knew what they were getting. However, Harris on the other hand had only been Vice President for 1 term and lacked a record of independent achievement. Therefore, considering voters tend to gravitate towards proven leadership in times of crisis, Trump had an advantage over Harris. A pivotal moment in the campaign arose on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2024, when during a campaign event in Pennsylvania, Trump was shot in the ear in a failed attempt on his life. While being ushered to safety, Trump defiantly stood up and pumped his fist in front of the cameras. The impact of this is clearly seen through his increased favourability, which, according to a Wall Street Journal poll tracker sat at 47% positive on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 9-points higher than it had been in the last pre-shooting poll on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July. Furthermore, Trump's approval reached its highest level since the WSJ started tracking Trump's favourability in November 2021. The image

of Trump bravely and defiantly walking off stage provided a sharp contrast to Biden who appeared frail and weak. This contrast was not just limited to Biden, but to his Vice President, Kamala Harris with whom he was closely associated. In an increasingly scary and unpredictable world, strength was needed to be President, and it was Trump who appeared to have that strength. The shooting also helped rally the support base of Donald Trump many of whom believed that it was the establishment who tried to kill the President to prevent him taking his rightful place as president after the stolen 2020 election, energising them to vote to push back against the elites. Another essential contributor to his victory came in the form of Elon Musk's swing state voting lottery, an attempt to encourage voters to support Trump in battleground states. This combined the appeal of winning with a financial incentive in a move that energised Trump's supporters. It also created a sense of urgency among voters who may have otherwise been apathetic. Trump's unorthodox media strategy allowed him to capitalise on negative media attention and put himself at the centre of national discourse. Trump avoided traditional media, preferring to go directly to his base through social media to produce a narrative of himself being a persecuted underdog, hounded by the establishment. This perception was accentuated by the overwhelmingly negative coverage he received on some mainstream news companies, as shown by a study showing that Trump received 85% negative coverage on news sources such as NBC, CBS and ABC. This is in sharp contrast to the 78% positive coverage for Harris by these sources. This helped Trump portray himself as a political outsider who was being treated unfairly.

Furthermore, many believe it was Trump's policies that secured his victory. Trump and his team focused heavily on the creation and return of jobs to America after outsourcing. This appealed particularly to traditionally democratic, blue-collar voters in de-industrialised rust belt states like Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan. Trump's messaging appealed to these types of voters, particularly his 'Make America Great Again' slogan, which invoked nostalgia for a time in recent American history when manufacturing jobs were plentiful, and many blue-collar Americans felt the country was at its peak. By portraying himself as the candidate who would return America to greatness, Trump built strong support from voters who felt left behind by the changing times. Trump also took on an anti-establishment rhetoric, mainly focusing on the reduction of federal bureaucracy and government oversight. This appealed to voters who felt Washington DC was in a bubble, isolated from the hard realities the American public had to contend with every day. Trump also endorsed implicit opposition to abortion, as seen by his self-congratulation for overturning the 'Roe vs Wade' court case which made abortion a constitutional right. The overturning of Roe has so far led to the restriction or outright banning of abortion access in 19 US states. Trump also explicitly supported a 15-week abortion ban with exceptions. This strengthened

Trump's support with conservative, Christian voters who felt that abortion was morally wrong. Equally, it alienated many voters for whom reproductive rights were essential in how they would vote. Trump also took a hardline approach to immigration, reiterating or introducing policy pledges such as to build a wall along the Mexican border, to mass deport illegal immigrants and to end birth-right citizenship. This enhanced Trump's desired appearance as a strong man, and made many voters who felt immigration threatened their country and way of life feel that Trump was protecting them from danger.

In conclusion, while the arguments that it was Trump and his campaign that won the 2024 US Presidential election, given the evidence, it was in fact Kamala Harris and her failed campaign that lost the winnable 2024 election. From the offset, Harris was beset with a major disadvantage, she only had 107 days to campaign for the Whitehouse, substantially less than the traditional upwards of 2 year's Presidential nominees usually spend campaigning. Harris was not presented with a steady march to election day, but a frantic 4-month sprint which would fall just short of victory. Couple this initial setback with a confused message, divided party and a candidate who struggled in the limelight, Kamala Harris didn't stand a chance. That is not to say that President Trump and his team did not significantly influence the elections outcome, because he and they did. Trump and his team connected with the hurt voters felt both emotionally and practically and took advantage of it. All the while, turning negatives, such as the lawsuits filed against him and his convictions into an opportunity to secure free media attention and further his persecuted victim narrative. Ultimately, the election result was close, with just 245,000 votes spread between the battleground states of Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan separating Ms Harris from the 270 electoral college votes she needed to win. Therefore, it is reasonable to ask the question, what should future democratic presidential tickets do to avoid a fat much like that of Kamala Harris? First and foremost, Democratic campaigns must listen to and campaign on the issues the public care about. Time and again during the 2024 election cycle, we saw surveys and polls saying the economy was the top concern for American voters. However, despite this the economy was still not the central focus of the Harris campaign, and when she did focus on the economy, her economic policies and proposals were outshone by the bigger, more ambitious polices of her opponent. In addition, future democrats must maintain a cohesive campaign message. Ultimately, Harris got lost in an amalgamation of contradictions in an attempt at being something to everyone. With this strategy Harris alienated as many votes as she attracted with it, if not more.