

Politics

Kamala Harris Is Gaining Swing-State Voters' Trust to Step In for Biden

The vice president also was the top choice among Democratic rising stars to run for the White House should Biden be unable to continue his campaign.



Kamala Harris in Florida on May 1. *Photographer: Malcolm Jackson/Bloomberg*

By [Akayla Gardner](#)

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Vice President Kamala Harris is increasingly endearing herself to swing-state voters, a development that if it persists, stands to neutralize Republican attacks around Joe Biden's age.

Nearly half of swing-state voters, 48%, say they trust Harris to fulfill the duties of the presidency if Biden were no longer able to serve, according to a Bloomberg News/Morning Consult [poll](#) conducted in early May. The reading

marks the highest level of confidence since the survey was first conducted in October.

In recent months, Harris – the first woman, Black or Asian vice president – has held a series of high-profile events that resonate with key parts of the Democratic base. They include a historic visit to a Minnesota abortion clinic, a nod to the rollback of federal reproductive rights that has galvanized women voters, and an impassioned speech at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, a landmark of the Civil Rights era. Harris and the administration have also leaned into detailing her personal arc and record in public office.

Republicans have sought to attack Biden's fitness for a second term by casting her as unprepared to take his place. Polling shows voters are more concerned about the fitness of Biden, 81, for office than Donald Trump, four years younger at 77.

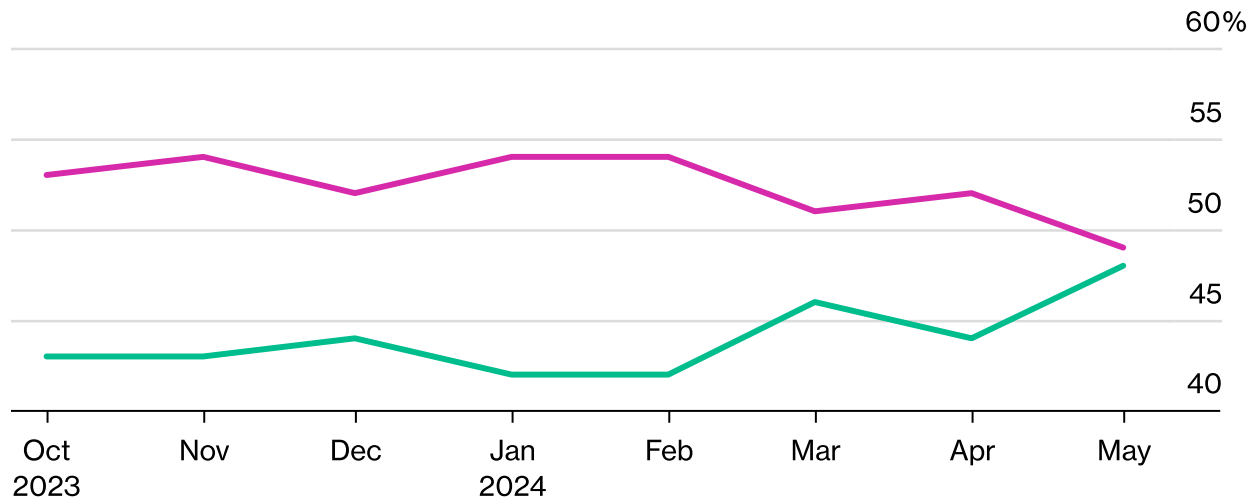
“It would be foolish to think that voters aren't thinking a little more about who the vice president is and whether she's capable of taking over,” said political scientist Christopher Devine, who co-authored a book about vice presidential candidates.

Still, despite voters' uptick in confidence in Harris, she trailed Trump by 7 percentage points in a hypothetical head-to-head, wider than the 4-point advantage Trump held over Biden in the poll.

If President Joe Biden were unable to fulfill the duties of the presidency, how much would you trust Vice President Kamala Harris to assume the responsibilities of the presidency?

Share of respondents who said:

/ A lot or some
 / Not much or not at all



Source: Bloomberg News/Morning Consult poll

The poll showed Harris as the top choice among those considered Democratic rising stars if Biden were unable to continue his campaign. That list includes Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, California Governor Gavin Newsom, Maryland Governor Wes Moore and Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.



Here's Why Inflation is Down But US Voters Don't Care

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Warming sentiment toward Harris was on display at a recent stop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a key swing state. During an on-stage interview with the vice president, comedian D.L. Hughley unexpectedly apologized.

“I have to say that I’m sorry,” Hughley told Harris. “I had let a media narrative co-opt my perspective, and I think that tends to happen with women and people of color.”

Hughley, who met privately with Harris in November, explained that he was critical of her time as a prosecutor in California, where he grew up and Harris spent her early political career. But, he said, “some of the things that I

have subsequently come to learn about you, not only make me proud of you, but make me be an advocate.”

Biden defeated Harris in the 2020 Democratic primary before choosing her as a running mate. Her vice presidency got off to an uneven start with Republicans pouncing on her gaffes.

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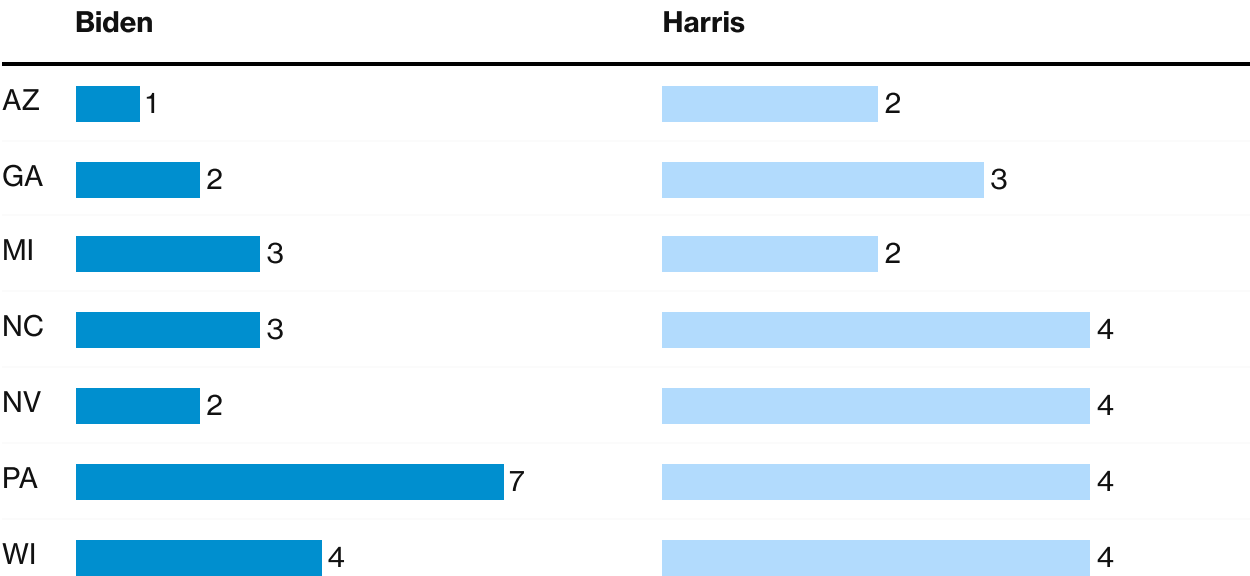
Donald Trump Keeps Lead in Swing States

Over the last year, the White House has deployed her on the offensive to counter political opponents, condemning book bans and new reproductive health restrictions. Harris frequently appears in front of audiences of color and young voters, which polls show are among the most disillusioned blocs of the Democratic base. Last week, she went viral online when she encouraged an audience of young Asian Americans to “kick that f— door down” in pursuit of their careers.

The vice president has made more trips to competitive Western and Southern states than Biden this year, particularly North Carolina, Georgia, Arizona and Nevada. Each has a high percentage of Latino or Black voters.

Harris Spends More Time on the Road in West, South

VP has visited Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada and Arizona more than Biden



Source: White House
Note: Travel since Jan. 1, 2024 as of May 23

“She is engaging communities that have not been engaged,” US Senator Laphonza Butler, a California Democrat, said in an interview.

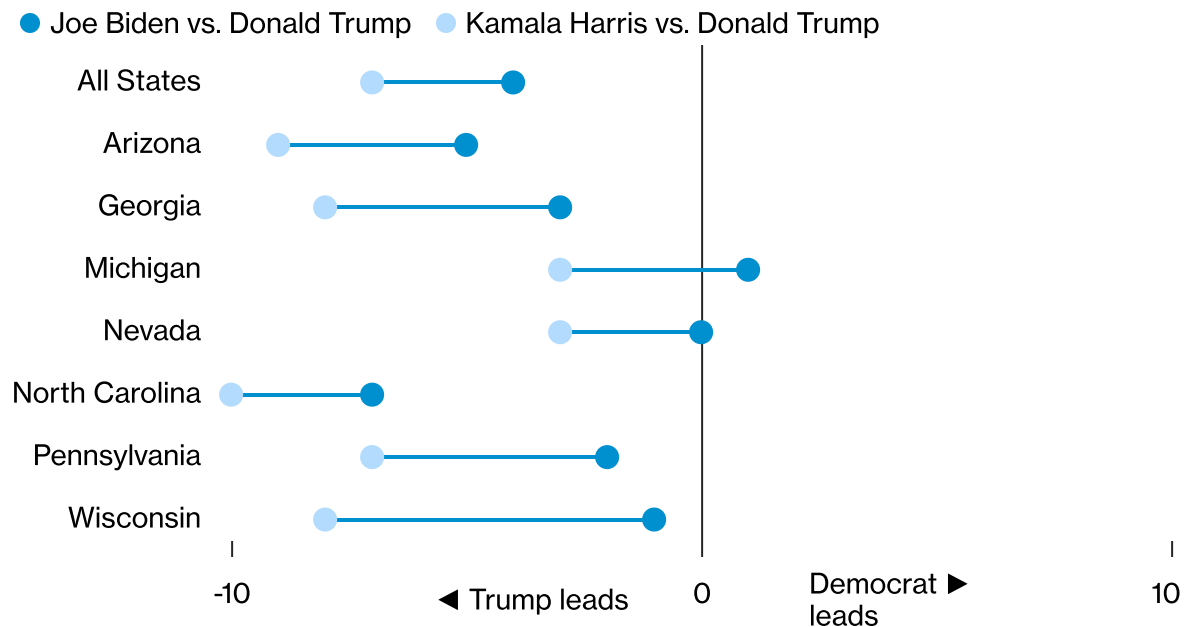
Trump leads Biden 48% to 44% across the seven swing states, according to the poll. His lead over Biden is widest in North Carolina, Arizona and Georgia. They’re tied in Nevada.

Read More: Half of Swing-State Voters Fear Violence Around US Election

Among possible White House aspirants, Harris led with 45% of swing-state voters supporting her if Biden dropped out before November. Whitmer and Buttigieg were the next at 36%, followed by Newsom at 32%, Moore at 23% and Pritzker at 21%.

If the November 2024 election for US president were being held today, and the following candidates were on the ballot, for whom would you vote?

Margin of Democratic advantage against Trump, in percentage points



Source: Bloomberg News/Morning Consult poll

Meanwhile, if Trump were unable to continue his campaign, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who Trump beat in the GOP primary, was the top alternative at 40%. Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, the runner-up to Trump in the Republican primary, was at 38%.

Trump hasn't yet chosen a running mate. Once he does, Harris will no longer be measured against "an abstraction or an ideal of what a vice president should be," vice-presidential scholar Joel Goldstein said. "She's going to be measured or viewed as against whoever he picks."



Kamala Harris greets attendees during the Service Employees International Union convention in Philadelphia on May 21. *Photographer: Hannah Beier/Bloomberg*

Harris' events are often shaped by closed-door conversations with individuals outside her orbit, according to a person familiar with the strategy.

Earn Your Leisure podcast hosts Rashad Bilal and Troy Millings joined Hughley, along with rapper Fat Joe and other influential men, for dinner at Harris' residence in November, according to people familiar with the event.

The discussion, along with a gathering of young entrepreneurs of color last May, help spur ideas for Harris' "Economic Opportunity" tour underway. The podcasting duo moderated the first stop in Atlanta last month.

The tour aims to reach Black men – who Trump and Republicans are courting – by emphasizing resources to build wealth.

"She can connect more readily with the audience that's most problematic for Democrats than almost anyone else can," Cornell Belcher, a Democratic pollster, said. "I would argue that is a really smart way to use her."

– *With assistance from Gregory Korte*

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