

Kamala Harris for President

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At the 1940 Republican National Convention, in Philadelphia, an uneasy affair marked by bomb scares, a British espionage scandal, and the imminence of global conflict, ten names were placed in nomination. On the sixth ballot, a corporate executive from Indiana named Wendell Willkie finally emerged as the challenger to [Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#), who was running for a third term. Desperate to find a way to compete with F.D.R., a political colossus who had lately engineered the New Deal and ended the Great Depression, Willkie challenged him to a series of radio debates.

This was something new in American life. F.D.R. hardly feared the medium—he'd been delivering his homey yet substance-rich fireside chats to the nation since 1933—but he nonetheless dodged Willkie's invitation, citing scheduling conflicts. In November, he crushed Willkie, and by the end of 1941 he was engaged in the struggle against [fascism](#).

The 2024 election also comes at a moment of national crisis. This time, however, the threat to the country's future—to its rule of law and its democratic institutions, its security and its character—resides not in a foreign capital but at a twenty-acre Xanadu on the Florida coast. For nine years, [Donald Trump](#) has represented an ongoing assault on the stability, the nerves, and the nature of the United States. As President, he amplified some of the ugliest currents in our political culture: nativism, [racism](#), misogyny, indifference to the disadvantaged, amoral isolationism. His narcissism and casual cruelty, his contempt for the truth, have contaminated public life. As Commander-in-Chief, he ridiculed the valor of fallen soldiers, he threatened to unravel the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and he emboldened autocrats everywhere, including [Vladimir Putin](#), Kim Jong Un, and [Viktor Orbán](#). When Trump lost to Joe Biden, in 2020, he tried every means possible to deny the will of the electorate and helped incite a violent insurrection on Capitol Hill.

In contrast, the Democratic Party's nominee, Vice-President [Kamala Harris](#), has displayed the basic values and political skills that would enable her to build on the successes of the Biden Administration and to help end, once and for all, a poisonous era defined by Trump. Few, if any, of our readers will be surprised that we endorse Harris in this election—but many would have been surprised, earlier this year, that the choice would end up being between Trump and the Vice-

President. The change in the Democratic candidate is the result, of course, of a debate of the sort that F.D.R. sidestepped.

During the past half century, these quadrennial confrontations have become a centerpiece of election season—a chance to glimpse the choice in real time, side by side. Aficionados may know the highlights of debates past: [Ronald Reagan](#), at the age of seventy-three, joking nimbly that he would not “exploit” the “youth and inexperience” of his fifty-six-year-old opponent, Walter Mondale; George H. W. Bush glancing at his watch after Bill Clinton answered a question from the audience; Mitt Romney assuring the country that, far from being a sexist, he had, in fact, “whole binders full of women” he had consulted for his gubernatorial cabinet.

Yet no debates have been as unusual or as consequential as the two we have just witnessed. The [first](#)—on June 27th, in Atlanta, between Trump and President Biden—proved to be an unmasking. On a human level, Biden’s nationally televised disintegration was a poignant spectacle. Viewed more coldly, it was a gift. Had it taken place, say, after the Conventions, it might have been too late to force a reassessment.

It was hardly a secret that Biden has aged, growing markedly less robust, particularly in the past eighteen months or so. If he got through an interview or a (rare) press conference

without incident, staff and supporters exhaled and treated it as a victory. But, rather than open the gate to a younger generation of Democratic candidates, Biden, his advisers, and the Party leadership stood in the way. They made it plain that a challenger would inevitably be defeated. Meanwhile, through spin and deft scheduling, the White House staff protected the President and hoped for the best. Tens of millions of voters, fearing another Trump Presidency, had little choice but to close their eyes and think of America.

But staying the course was, as the polls were suggesting, probably a doomed strategy. In an attempt to invigorate the campaign, Biden and his team took the risk of challenging Trump to an early debate. Perhaps a forceful, coherent performance would diminish the doubts about the President's capacity to govern well into his mid-eighties. It was not to be. The debate, broadcast on CNN, was a humbling. Biden's resting expression of slack confusion was almost as unnerving as his faltering efforts to make a clear and vivid case for his reëlection. When Jake Tapper asked him about the national debt, he delivered a wobbly reply that concluded, "Look, if—we finally beat Medicare." After Biden gave a similarly jumbled response to a question about immigration, Trump said only, "I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence. I don't think he knows what he said, either." By Trumpian standards, this was a kindness. It was also the end of the Biden candidacy.

For the next twenty-four days, the President travelled a hard road from denial to acceptance. All of us face the assault of time, but few must reckon with mortality before the eyes of the world. Biden loves the job and thought he was uniquely positioned to defeat Trump once more. But finally, after absorbing discouragement from [Nancy Pelosi](#), Chuck Schumer, the Obamas, and others, Biden, in an act of grace, issued a letter concluding that it was "in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down." In a separate message, he gave his endorsement to Kamala Harris.

The second Presidential debate, at the National Constitution Center, in Philadelphia, was an unmasking of another kind. For some time, observers have asked whether Trump, who is now seventy-eight, has himself suffered from some form of decline. On a given day, it is hard to determine if a particular insult, lie, or rant represents his usual malevolence or something else. Not long before the debate, Trump took to speculating whether it would be preferable, in the event of finding oneself on a sinking boat, to die by shark attack or by electrocution from the boat's battery. ("I'll take electrocution every single time," he assured a grateful nation.) There is nothing he will not say. When a group of Proud Boys were convicted of conspiracy last year, he warned that the F.B.I. and the Justice Department were just getting started: "*get smart america, they are coming after you!!!*" Trump has

defied multiple legal gag orders, attacking judges and jurors, and has even blamed the latest attempt on his life, a deeply alarming event, not on the would-be assailant or the easy availability of assault weapons but on the Democratic ticket.

For Harris, the debate presented an opportunity to expose Trump at his worst. All she had to do was to prick his vanity. Trump's rallies were boring, she suggested. Military leaders thought he was a "disgrace." Foreign leaders ate his lunch, considered him weak, laughed at him. With growing rage, Trump began howling from a familiar hymnal. America is a "failing nation." Migrants are pouring in from "prisons and jails, from mental institutions and insane asylums." Indelibly, Trump picked up on a racist, [J. D. Vance](#)-endorsed conspiracy theory about Haitian migrants in Ohio and gave it his full voice:

In Springfield, they're eating the *dogs*. The people that came in. They're eating the *cats*. They're eating the *pets* of the people that live there. And this is what's happening in our country. And it's a shame.

Trump went on in this vein of fact-free bluster, bringing discomfort even to some fellow-Republicans. He had been calling Harris "dumb as a rock" and "unable to speak properly without a teleprompter" or even "put two sentences together," while mocking her looks, her family, her racial identity, her personal life. He refused to pronounce her name

correctly. Harris decided to flick all that lint from her shoulder. She left it to the moderators to correct Trump's facts and the electorate to behold his lunacy. It was a performance that had the potential to lay bare Trump's character for those voters who might not have been paying much attention. After the debate, Trump, of course, declared a "*BIG WIN,*" but he then issued a loser's proclamation: "*there will be no third debate.*" Some days later, he had more to say about that night, particularly about an endorsement that came his opponent's way minutes after the debate's conclusion. On his social-media platform, he wrote, "*i hate taylor swift!*"

In the fall of 2016, the editors of *The New Yorker* published an enthusiastic endorsement of Hillary Clinton:

On November 8th, barring some astonishment, the people of the United States will, after two hundred and forty years, send a woman to the White House. The election of Hillary Clinton is an event that we will welcome for its immense historical importance, and greet with indescribable relief. It will be especially gratifying to have a woman as commander-in-chief after such a sickeningly sexist and racist campaign, one that exposed so starkly how far our society has to go.

The lack of sufficient caution remains, well, an astonishment. We all learned a painful lesson. Trump has never won the

national popular vote, and the elections of 2018 and 2020 were setbacks for the Republicans; in 2022, the anticipated “red wave” failed to materialize. And yet in rural towns, in struggling deindustrialized cities, in the South and the Midwest, his popularity is broad and deep. His strength among Black and Latino men has grown. He has the ardent backing of tech billionaires like [Elon Musk](#), right-wing legal activists like Leonard Leo, and no small number of Wall Street executives whose highest priorities are to prevent regulation and changes to their tax status. Coming out of the [Democratic National Convention](#), and then the September 10th debate, Harris made extraordinary inroads with the electorate; she’s got the “vibes,” as this year’s cliché has it. But the race remains very close. In both 2016 and 2020, Trump outperformed the polls. No responsible assessment of the contest has the luxury of focussing only on the imperatives for a Harris Administration and gliding past the ramifications of another Trump Administration.

There’s every reason to think that Trump II would be far worse than Trump I. Twice impeached, found liable for sexual abuse, convicted of thirty-four felony counts, and facing many more state and federal charges, Trump would return to the White House in a spirit of vengeance. He would immediately set about betraying his oath to “preserve, protect, and defend” the Constitution and wage battle against the independence of the Department of Justice in

order to preserve, protect, and defend himself. He has made it clear that he would also use the powers at his disposal to punish his opponents. And this time there would be no advisers who would rein him in.

Trump is a menacing presence in American life, and most of his former associates know it. Of his forty-two former Cabinet secretaries, only half have endorsed him. More than two hundred staffers for four previous Republican Presidents and Presidential candidates have endorsed the Democratic ticket. High-ranking officials who once surrounded Trump—including former Vice-President [Mike Pence](#), former Defense Secretaries Jim Mattis and Mark Esper, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the former chief of staff John Kelly, the former national-security advisers [John Bolton](#) and H. R. McMaster, and the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley—regard him as unfit, a threat to national security.

Trump's campaign has centered on immigration. His first-term abominations included family separation, the Muslim ban, and the decimation of the refugee and asylum system. Now he and advisers like [Stephen Miller](#) want to carry out mass deportations reminiscent of the Eisenhower Administration's "Operation Wetback," promising the creation of vast internment camps for undocumented immigrants. Such efforts would require the participation of

the Department of Defense and the National Guard. These goals are not only unrealistic; they're undemocratic.

There are more than eleven million undocumented immigrants living in the United States; at least sixty per cent of them have lived here for more than a decade. Under Trump, federal agents would target anyone they could, without clear guidelines or priorities. This policy would tear apart families, unleash fear in immigrant communities, and lead to racial profiling and discrimination.

A second Trump Administration also augurs economic disaster. His promised tax cuts would hollow out the government's finances, especially if he manages to enact the escalating measures that he has promised while campaigning, such as making Social Security benefits tax-free. Then, there's his plan to impose tariffs of up to twenty per cent on imports, plus much higher duties on anything made in China. According to credible economic models, this would bring a resurgence of inflation, raising the cost of living for those least able to afford it.

Trump's effect on the judiciary would be no less alarming. In his first term, he appointed three Supreme Court Justices, who played an essential role in eliminating the constitutional right to an abortion. Twenty-two states have since either restricted the procedure or banned it outright, and states in the latter category (including Tennessee, Louisiana, and

Mississippi) have some of the country's highest rates of maternal and infant mortality.

Nor is this the only respect in which Trump's judicial appointments have imperilled public health and safety. The judges he named to the federal bench have continued his campaign of regulatory sabotage. A series of recent Supreme Court rulings have invited polluting industries to challenge pretty much any rule, old or new, that they don't like.

Despite such rulings—and despite a recklessly expansive opinion about Presidential immunity—Trump has sometimes complained that the Court remains insufficiently compliant. Three Justices are currently in their seventies; if Trump gets another round of picks, he is likely to make personal loyalty a deciding factor. Notwithstanding a constitutional duty to “take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed,” he has indicated that, once in office, he would dismiss federal criminal cases pending against him, and, with the help of a suitably pliable Attorney General, he would almost certainly fire the special counsel Jack Smith. “I have the absolute right to pardon myself,” Trump has said. A subservient Justice Department and judiciary could readily be enlisted in his vendettas: Trump—who has insinuated that Mark Milley should have been executed for disloyalty—has also said that he might well prosecute political opponents, including Joe

Biden.

Trump's record on the environment is the worst of any President in modern history. His Administration rolled back nearly a hundred regulations aimed at protecting the nation's air, water, and wildlife. It dismantled Obama-era efforts to limit greenhouse-gas emissions and withdrew the U.S. from the Paris climate agreement. Trump's Department of the Interior rushed to lease public lands for oil and gas drilling, and his Department of Energy worked methodically to weaken efficiency standards. A 2020 analysis by the Rhodium Group estimated that the Trump Administration's actions would result in the release of an extra 1.8 billion tons of CO₂ by 2035, a planetarily disastrous outcome. And Trump has continued to scoff at climate science. Talking to Elon Musk, in August, he asserted that one impact of sea-level rise would be the creation of "more oceanfront property."

Discussion about foreign policy in this election season has been, as always, limited at best. Trump's pronouncements are either flip ("I don't give a shit about *nato*") or dismaying in both their specifics and their evasions. With respect to the horrific events of the past year in the Middle East—the Hamas attack on October 7th, in which twelve hundred people were killed and more than two hundred taken hostage, and Israel's subsequent war in Gaza, which has left

more than forty thousand Palestinians dead and countless people displaced—Trump’s response is that it “would have never happened” if he had been in office. When he was in the White House, he presided over the signing of the Abraham Accords, which promised a new era in relations between Israel and more of its Arab neighbors but paid almost no attention to the rights and the future of the Palestinian people.

In the recent debate, Trump was asked simply if he wanted Ukraine to prevail against its invader, Putin’s Russia. Trump, who appears to prefer aggressive Russian authoritarianism to Ukraine’s evolving democracy, could not bring himself to answer in the affirmative and convey support for Ukraine’s struggle to preserve its sovereignty and independence. Indeed, Trump radiates contempt for Ukraine’s President, Volodymyr Zelensky, who failed to deliver on Trump’s thuggish demand, in 2019, that, in exchange for weapons shipments already earmarked for Kyiv, he investigate the Biden family. Putin, who has shredded nascent democratic institutions and procedures in his own country to create a system based solely on his authority, is more Trump’s style.

Trump is no more assuring when it comes to China policy. [Xi Jinping](#), whom Trump has recently praised as a “brilliant guy” who “runs 1.4 billion people with an iron fist,” believes that the world is undergoing a realignment—“changes

unseen in a century." Once again, Trump seems uninterested. He has suggested that he might leave Taiwan to fend for itself in the event of a Chinese attack. The island should "pay us for defense," he said. Trump warns of another world war, and yet here, too, his policies seem designed to encourage aggression and destabilize the international order.

In every arena, there is little question that a Harris Presidency promises far greater sanity and far greater humanity. As recently as three months ago, the Washington cognoscenti cast aspersions on her political skills. These quickly evaporated as Harris and her running mate, [Tim Walz](#), the shrewd and appealing governor of Minnesota, have rapidly proved to be effective campaigners. Their swift transformation of the Democratic Party's prospects for November has been astonishing. Harris deserves enormous credit for stepping fearlessly into the role that fate has dealt her. In the face of a malign opponent, she has behaved with poise, conviction, and intelligence. Of course, her ability to carry out her policy ambitions would improve immeasurably with the election of Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate. But, whatever the circumstances, her positions on the critical issues are rational, undergirded by a basic sense of decency, and often compelling.

Where Trump promises mass deportations, she has

expressed support both for boosting border enforcement and for opening avenues that would lead to legal immigration. The refugee program, which is both a moral imperative and a pragmatic tool of U.S. foreign policy, has grown substantially during the Biden-Harris Administration. The government has also tempered interior enforcement, allowing the large undocumented population, particularly those with families and deep ties to local communities, to live without constant fear of arrest and deportation.

The Biden-Harris record on asylum at the border is mixed, partly because the policy solutions are far more complex. Harris has said that she would support a bipartisan Senate bill that drastically curtails asylum, and, in the current climate, support for that bill is politically expedient. But there is good reason to believe that, if elected, Harris could be pushed to combine increasing vigilance at the border with more policies that would provide relief to those in desperate need. She has been clear that she would protect undocumented families and find ways to bring a sense of compassion to the immigration system. Congress, to be sure, has been a barrier to any meaningful efforts at immigration reform; conservative courts, together with Republican state attorneys general, would try to limit what Harris could do by executive order. But the alternative is unimaginably bad.

On the subject of economics, Harris's proposals have sometimes lacked detail, but they thoughtfully address concerns of working-class and middle-class Americans, with a particular focus on the cost of housing. President Biden, for his part, has made a concerted effort to reestablish the Democratic Party's bond with blue-collar voters. He has been unusually pro-union and pro-manufacturing. There's a reason that, after the disastrous first debate, some of the most diehard Biden loyalists were on the Party's left. The inflation that rose earlier in his term—and that his political adversaries have used to define his economic record—has now abated, while Biden can be credited with passing programs that directed federal spending toward badly needed infrastructure projects and green-energy projects. The U.S. is currently leading its peers in the rate of economic growth.

Owing to Senate opposition, Biden has struggled to follow through on his ambition to bolster the "care economy," through paid family leave, child tax credits, and other measures. Although Harris has pulled back from Biden's positions in certain areas—she favors, for example, a more modest corporate tax increase—these family-relief programs are the part of Biden's agenda that she is most enthusiastic about. She will push hard for them, alongside her initiatives aimed at easing the housing crisis.

For the Harris campaign, the most emotionally galvanizing issue has been abortion. This will be the first Presidential election since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Close to ninety million women have registered to vote this November, and historical data show that women have favored Democrats over Republicans in every general election since 1992. As Vice-President, Harris has emerged as a leading voice on abortion, framing it powerfully as a matter of bodily autonomy and a right to health care. She has called for concrete policy changes, such as reinstating federal protections for abortion, and has never shied away from making forceful statements on the issue. In March, Harris toured a Planned Parenthood clinic in Minnesota, becoming the first Vice-President to make a public appearance at an abortion provider.

Leaders in the field of women's health have praised her directness and see it as a welcome change from Biden's wavering stance. (In this year's State of the Union address, he failed to say the word "abortion" once, even though it was included in his prepared remarks.) As a senator, she sponsored bills designed to improve maternal health and guarantee access to contraception. In 2018, during Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court confirmation hearings, she memorably asked him, "Can you think of any laws that give government the power to make decisions about the male body?" She also sought to limit a state's ability to ban

abortion unilaterally. "If there are those who dare to take the freedom to make such a fundamental decision for an individual, which is about one's own body," Harris said of abortion rights at a campaign fund-raiser in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, "what other freedoms could be on the table for the taking?"

Harris has a reasonably strong environmental record, even if in recent months she has chosen to give it only modest attention. As California's attorney general, she pursued several high-profile cases against polluters, including one against ConocoPhillips for endangering water supplies. In 2016, she sued the Obama Administration over a plan to allow offshore fracking in the Santa Barbara Channel. (A federal judge sided with Harris, and an injunction remains in place.) In the Senate, she promoted electric school buses and was an early co-sponsor of a resolution calling for a Green New Deal. Running for President in 2019, Harris, who has called climate change an "existential threat," said that she would ban fracking for oil and gas. She has since reversed that position, but, as Vice-President, she cast the tie-breaking vote for the Inflation Reduction Act, which contains hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of new spending and tax breaks for clean-energy projects.

On foreign policy, Harris, who has spent many hours in national-security briefings, speaks the language of liberal

internationalism, echoing Biden's policies, from Ukraine to the Middle East. But she is of a different generation than Biden. We can reasonably hope that, as she maintains his commitment to traditional allies and alliances, she will also employ American leverage when those allies are acting heedlessly. With respect to Gaza, she has voiced support for two states for two peoples; she has reasserted Israel's right to security while at the same time evoking the "heartbreaking" suffering of the Palestinian people, and calling for an immediate end to the war, with a resolution that would enable Palestinians to "realize their right to dignity, security, freedom, and self-determination." But she also will need to act decisively in the United States' interest when dealing with someone like Benjamin Netanyahu, who has frequently given American Presidents the back of his hand while benefitting immensely from American support.

With regard to China, Harris is likely to extend Biden's posture of watchful, skeptical competitiveness. A former prosecutor, she often views foreign policy through the lens of international law, and she has rebuked China for expanding its territorial footprint. In 2022, shortly after her first meeting with Xi, when some leaders might have attempted to send reassuring signals, Harris did the opposite: during a visit to the Philippines, she vowed America's support "in the face of intimidation and coercion in the South China Sea."

Four years ago, in our endorsement of Joe Biden, we said that, while he was leading in the polls, we hoped he would displace Trump “by a margin that prevents prolonged dispute or the kind of civil unrest that Trump appears to relish.” We know what happened: the margins, in four decisive states, were extremely narrow, and Trump refused to concede. Instead, he levelled wild accusations and filed dozens of lawsuits. When those failed, he called on his *MAGA* believers to march on the Capitol. This time around, the Trump campaign and various right-wing groups have already deployed deny-the-vote efforts around the country, particularly in swing states like Georgia, Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Arizona. There is every likelihood that, if Trump loses, the drama could go on for weeks or months after Election Day. He has made no secret of the fact that he is willing to use every lever, deploy every dirty trick, political and rhetorical, to bring the country to the brink once more.

And so the choice is stark. The United States simply cannot endure another four years of Donald Trump. He is an agent of chaos, an enemy of liberal democracy, and a threat to America’s moral standing in the world. Kamala Harris—who has shown herself to be sensible, humane, and liberal-minded—is our choice for the Presidency. At the National Constitution Center, in Philadelphia, a few weeks ago, the American people were able to see both the stakes of this election and the vast differences between the candidates.

The right choice—the necessary choice—is beyond
debate. ◆