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Exclusive

Harris Has Taken Narrow Lead Over Trump, WSJ Poll Finds

Voters have largely positive views of Democratic nominee, who gets 48% compared to 47% for Republican Donald Trump

By Aaron Zitner

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WASHINGTON—Kamala Harris has stepped out of the shadow of her role as the Biden administration vice president and has established herself as a candidate who voters view largely in positive terms, giving her a narrow lead in the presidential election against Donald Trump, a new Wall Street Journal poll finds.

Harris had 48% support to Trump's 47% in a head-to-head test of the two candidates, and she led by 2 points, 47% to 45%, on a ballot that included independent and third-party candidates, according to the poll, which was conducted after Democrats concluded their televised national convention. The leads in both matchups fell within the survey's margin of error of plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

The poll marked the first time that the Democratic candidate led Trump head-to-head in any Journal survey dating to April of last year. Trump had a 2-point advantage over Harris in the Journal's head-to-head test in late July.

The poll finds little evidence that Trump has succeeded so far in his efforts to tarnish Harris, which have included labeling her agenda of targeted aid for families and new home buyers as "communist" and arguing that she deserves the same poor marks that President Biden earns from voters on handling the economy and immigration. Both parties are spending millions of ad dollars and significant effort in their campaign messages to try to define Harris, who became her party's nominee only after Biden ended his candidacy less than six weeks ago.

Rather, voters now view Harris in a more positive light than they view Trump, and they view both candidates about equally when asked who will stand up for American workers, has a vision for the future and will bring needed change to the country.

Moreover, Harris has blunted much of Trump's advantage over Biden, when he was running for re-election, as the candidate best able to manage the economy. Trump holds an 8-point advantage over Harris when voters are asked who would best handle the economy and a 5-point lead on handling inflation. Late last year, Trump led Biden by about 20 points on both

those issues.

About 84% of people in the survey said they know enough about Harris's career and policy positions to have a firm opinion of her, and 49% hold a favorable view of her, equal to the share with an unfavorable view. That marks a big improvement from early July, when unfavorable views outweighed positive views of Harris by 23 percentage points.

About 45% view Trump favorably and 53% unfavorably, a weaker rating than voters give to Harris—but still better than Trump's ratings before the mid-July assassination attempt against him.

Harris's standing likely reflects the four days of speeches and videos that the Democratic Party offered at its convention last week, which sought to introduce her as an effective leader and to damage Trump's standing. Voters still give Harris poor marks for handling her job as vice president—about 42% approve and 51% disapprove, essentially unchanged from before the convention—a signal that for some voters her image as the Democratic nominee has become largely detached from her role in the administration.

“Voters are assessing her job approval as Biden's vice president, but they are assessing her as her own candidate for president,” said Michael Bocian, a Democratic pollster who worked on the survey with Republican David Lee. “She has emerged successfully as a candidate.”

As a national survey of registered voters, the Journal poll doesn't draw a picture of the race in any of the battleground states that will decide the election outcome in the Electoral College. But it adds to evidence that the two candidates are running neck-and-neck. Because Democrats run up the score in populous states such as California, the party traditionally needs a lead in national polling of 3 points or more to signal that it is also ahead in the swing states, where the two parties are more evenly matched.

In fact, the Journal survey found Trump ahead among voters who lived in any of the seven battleground states. Lee said that after weeks of positive media coverage and a convention bump, “Kamala Harris has managed to tie Donald Trump nationally—and a tie nationally points to a sizable electoral win for Trump.” He pointed out that Democrat Hillary Clinton won the national popular vote by more than 2 percentage points in 2016 but lost in the Electoral College.

Voters also view Harris's running mate, Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota, more favorably than unfavorably, 46% to 40%, while unfavorable views of Trump's running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, outweigh positive views by 10 points, 50% to 40%.

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- Read the poll questionnaire and results.
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The poll finds that Democratic efforts to highlight Project 2025, the conservative policy agenda assembled by the Heritage Foundation think tank and its allies, have largely been successful, as 57% view it unfavorably, including 53% who have “very unfavorable” views. Only 9% see the proposed agenda in a positive light. Democrats featured Project 2025's

proposals for limiting abortion access, ending or scaling back the Education Department and reducing the influence of federal civil-service workers as the template for a next Trump administration, a claim that Trump has strongly denied.

In another potential effect of the Democratic convention, more Democratic voters than Republican voters now say they are enthusiastic about their chosen candidate, 90% to 82%. Republicans showed the greater enthusiasm in late July—and they had an overwhelming lead in early July, when only 37% of Democrats said they were enthusiastic about Biden as their choice.

One question now is whether the Democrats' presumed "convention bump" will fade, as is often the case. After the GOP convention and assassination attempt on Trump in July, voters gave Trump the highest presidential job-approval grade and favorability rating in Journal polling dating to late 2021, marks that faded a bit in the new survey.

In addition to immigration and the economy, voters view Trump as better able than Harris to handle the war between Israel and Hamas, as well as threats from Russia and China. But Harris has expanded her lead as the candidate best suited to handle abortion rights—at a time when the survey also finds record-high support, in Journal polls dating to early 2022, for the idea that abortion should be legal in all cases. About 31% hold that view, with 33% saying abortion should be mostly legal, with some restrictions.

Harris showed continued progress in repairing the Democratic coalition that elected Biden in 2020, which had been fraying as voters came to see the president as too old to serve a second term and ineffective in handling inflation and the economy. Black, Latino and young voters, all important components of the Democratic coalition, were abandoning Biden and endangering his chances of re-election.

Harris now has the support of 83% of Black voters, the new survey found, a gain that could be particularly important in swing states such as Georgia, where about 30% of 2020 voters were Black. While her support grew by 5 points since late July, and was well ahead of the 68% of Black voters that Biden drew in several Journal surveys this year, it is still below the 91% support Biden won in 2020, as recorded by exit polls.

Harris also made gains among Latino voters, but the new survey found her winning voters under age 30 by a narrow 47% to 45%, a far weaker showing than the 25-point advantage over Trump that Biden posted among that age group in 2020.

The Wall Street Journal poll surveyed 1,500 registered voters from Aug. 24-28 by cellphone and landline phone, with some respondents offered the survey via text-to-web. The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

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