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USA

Harris Moves Right in Search of a Majority

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV596-September 2024 -

Publication date: Thursday 5 September 2024

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Vice-President Kamala Harris, now the Democratic nominee of an enthusiastic party, has had phenomenal initial success. Since entering the race on July 21, she and her running mate Governor Tim Walz of Minnesota, have raised \$540 million, organized Zoom calls involving hundreds of thousands of supporters, and held rallies of thousands. Blacks, Latinos, women, and young voters are driving her surge. With her party solidly behind her, she has moved to the right to try to win over independents and perhaps even some Republicans.

As a candidate for president in the 2020 Democratic primary, Harris first presented herself as a progressive, but when criticized moved to the liberal center, then lost support because of her wavering, and finally dropped out before the primary election. This time, she plans to make no such mistake. She is in the center and learning right.

In her acceptance speech at the Democratic Party National Convention (DNC), she was ardently patriotic. America, she said, “was the greatest nation on earth,” and “the greatest democracy in the history of the world.” She promised that, “As Commander-in-Chief, I will ensure America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world.” And, she added, “I will make sure that America—not China—wins the competition for the 21st century. And that we strengthen—not abdicate—our global leadership.” The organizers of the convention made sure that it was filled with thousands of American flags and the delegates chanted “U.S.A.”—both features usually associated with the Republicans.

Harris has moderated her previous positions on several other issues. Once an opponent of private health insurance and an advocate of universal government insurance, she dropped that back in 2020. Once an opponent of fracking, she now accepts it because opposing it could cost her the key state of Pennsylvania where it is an important part of the economy and provider of jobs. She also once supported the position that all cars should have zero emissions by 2040, but she no longer backs an electric vehicle mandate. Similarly, after Black Lives Matter, she was in favor of reducing police budgets and providing more funds for social services. She no longer supports cutting police budgets. She initially opposed former president Donald Trump’s border wall, then when President Joe Biden accepted the idea, so did she. She now says if the bipartisan bill containing a border wall passes Congress, she will sign it. In 2020 she supported a mandatory buyback program for military-style assault weapons. (Lillis and Schnell, “5 issues,” *The Hill*, 8/29/24)

On Middle East, she adheres to Biden’s support for Israel while nominally backing a ceasefire. She stated in her acceptance speech, “President Biden and I are working to end this war such that Israel is secure, the hostages are released, the suffering in Gaza ends, and the Palestinian people can realize their right to dignity. Security. Freedom. And self-determination.” Noble words. But they are not attached to any actual proposal that could bring about such a result, such as cutting military aid to Israel.

Harris’ approach appears to be working. The latest poll by USA TODAY and Suffolk University shows Harris leading Trump by 48% to 43%, and she has put four states previously leaning toward Trump into contention: Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina. All are key to the election. Harris and Trump will debate on September 10.

Before Harris entered the race, hundreds of thousands of Democratic Party primary voters opposed the U.S. policy on Palestine cast their ballots in the primary election as uncommitted. How they will vote in the election on Tuesday, November 5 remains an open question. Despite all of Harris’ problematic positions, she still provides the only vehicle to defeat Trump.

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