

Weekly Commentary 34

Can the Democrats win? Trump or Harris, what does it mean for Asia?

The Obamas have approved, after one week of deliberation, Kamala Harris' bid for the presidency in November. The powers that be in the Democratic Party will still have to choose Harris' running mate. They will likely choose someone who can help her win against the formidable Trump-Vance campaign from three or four choices. The Washington Post has this to say:

Harris embarks on sprint to find Democratic running mate

The likely presidential nominee is mulling roughly a dozen potential vice-presidential candidates and plans to make a decision by Aug. 7.

By Patrick Svitek, Tyler Pager and Dan Diamond

July 26, 2024 at 5:00 a.m. EDT

Vice President Harris is in a two-week sprint to lock in a running mate after President Biden's stunning decision to end his reelection campaign, a search that suddenly elevates the potential political assets — and vulnerabilities — of the Democratic Party's bench.

Harris is considering roughly a dozen potential vice-presidential candidates, though allies say three have risen to the top: Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro (D), Sen. Mark Kelly (D-Ariz.) and North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper (D). The allies, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a confidential process, cautioned that the process is in its early stages and that Harris's aides are still mulling an expansive group of contenders.

The process officially got underway Tuesday, and Harris plans to make a decision by Aug. 7, aligning with the national party's plan to virtually nominate a ticket by then. "She has a lot of great people to choose from," Cooper told The Washington Post on Thursday, declining to comment on his own interest. "She has to win. I want her to win. I want her to pick the person that can help her win. I respect her process, and I don't want to comment on that process."

Who Harris might pick as her vice-presidential running mate

As Vice President Harris continues to shore up Democratic support for the nomination, here's a list of widely discussed names that could join her on the ticket.

During local news conferences and cable news appearances, potential vice-presidential candidates have spent recent days playing coy about their intentions while also testing out lines of attack against Republican nominee Donald Trump and his running mate, Sen. JD Vance (R-Ohio). Some will get a chance to audition on the campaign trail in the coming days — including Shapiro, who is set to co-headline a Harris campaign event Monday in Pennsylvania.

Among those navigating the new and intense speculation is Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear (D). During a news conference Thursday in his home state, Beshear began taking reporters' questions by proactively addressing what he said was "likely to be asked over and over again."

"I am honored to be considered and regardless of what comes next, I'll do everything I can between now and Election Day to elect Kamala Harris as the next president of the United States of America," Beshear said.

The decision is an early and major test for Harris's days-old presidential campaign. Biden picked her as his running mate in 2020 because he wanted someone who shared his values and could immediately be effective on the job — and Harris is said to be approaching the search similarly.

Harris initially considered some military and business leaders, though one of them, retired Navy Adm. William McRaven, said Wednesday that he had removed his name from consideration. And while she is thinking about some female politicians, her shortlist overwhelmingly contains White men, reflecting assumptions that voters would prefer gender and racial balance with a Black woman leading the ticket.

"Vice President Harris has directed her team to begin the process of vetting potential running mates," Harris campaign spokesperson Kevin Munoz said in a statement. "That process has begun in earnest and we do not expect to have additional updates until the Vice President announces who will be serving as her running mate and as the next Vice President of the United States."

Many Democratic Party leaders are giving Harris space to make her decision and declining to publicly offer their preferences. But some local and state parties and individuals have formally backed potential vice-presidential nominees from their area, including in Arizona, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

"The path to the White House runs through Arizona, and we are confident that with Kamala Harris and Mark Kelly at the top of the ticket, Democrats will win in November," Arizona's party chair, Yolanda Bejarano, said in a statement. Rep. Angie Craig (Minn.), among the earliest House Democrats to call on Biden to step aside, is openly pushing for her state's governor, Tim Walz.

At the same time, the potential running mates are suddenly seeing their records scrutinized by fellow Democrats.

Kelly on Wednesday sought to neutralize one of his political vulnerabilities, making clear he supports the Pro Act, which would ease the path toward forming unions and winning labor contracts. Kelly has drawn scrutiny from labor groups because he is one of the few senators who caucus with Democrats who have not signed on to that legislation over the years.

Harris shouted out the Pro Act during a trip to Houston on Thursday. Addressing the American Federation of Teachers, Harris said Biden had promised to sign the legislation into law if it reached his desk — and "I promise you I will keep that promise."

During a Democratic National Committee media call Thursday with union leaders, reporters asked whether there were concerns over Kelly being considered for the vice-presidential slot. Abhi Rahman, a DNC spokesman, did not directly respond to the question, saying, “As a reminder, the DNC is still going through a process — an open and transparent process — to select our next nominee.”

The DNC Rules Committee approved a nomination process Wednesday under which virtual voting could start as soon as Aug. 1. DNC officials have long aimed to wrap up the process by Aug. 7 to avoid potential GOP litigation related to Ohio’s ballot certification deadline. Ohio lawmakers moved it back from Aug. 7 to accommodate Democrats, but Democrats say they do not trust the GOP-led legislature and do not want to take any chances.

In Pennsylvania, Shapiro has sought to carve out a distinct ideological profile that includes some positions at odds with his party, including support for school vouchers, which tap tax dollars to send students to private schools. A coalition of pro-public education groups sent a letter to Harris on Wednesday asking her to not pick Shapiro. Shapiro has also been an outspoken supporter of Israel after Hamas’s attack on the country last year, putting him at odds with some Democrats who want the United States to push back harder against the country’s war effort. At the same time, Shapiro, who is Jewish, has lined up with fellow Democrats in criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying in January that he is taking Israel in the “wrong direction.”

“The things that Josh brings to the ticket, looking at it purely from an electoral contest standpoint, is accomplished governor of a swing state, absolutely relentless campaigner,” said Daniel Bauder, president of the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO.

“When Josh ran in ’22 for governor, he ran against a deeply unpopular Republican opponent, but he treated the race as if he were running neck-and-neck the entire time.”

Bauder said he did not think any party-splitting positions would necessarily be “deficiencies when examining Josh as a potential running mate.”

“Ultimately the platform is set by the party and the president,” Bauder said.

One consideration regarding Cooper is that under the North Carolina Constitution, the lieutenant governor becomes the acting governor whenever the governor leaves the state. That means that if Cooper were to be out campaigning for Harris, the acting governor would be Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, a GOP firebrand running for governor.

Last year, while Cooper was traveling in Japan, Robinson used his temporary powers to declare a week of solidarity with Israel after the Hamas attacks on the country. Cooper responded critically, calling it a political stunt given Robinson’s history of antisemitic comments.

On Thursday, Cooper’s office argued that its legal analysis shows the governor’s powers “do not transfer to the Lieutenant Governor so long as the Governor is able to remain in communication and direct state government action when traveling.”

“If the Governor ceded official responsibility and authority during any physical travel outside North Carolina, it would lead to chaos and confusion,” Cooper spokesperson Sadie Weiner said in a statement.

Cooper, in a Post interview, said he has been able to manage the state “pretty well” while traveling as governor.

Chris Cooper, a political science professor at Western Carolina University, predicted that Robinson would not have that much impact as acting governor.

Chris Cooper noted Republicans in the state legislature already have veto-proof majorities, so there would be little political incentive for them to jam through a bill for Robinson’s signature while Roy Cooper is gone.

“The big 10,000-foot deal is the North Carolina governor is incredibly weak — arguably the weakest in the country — and a one-day governor is even weaker,” Chris Cooper said.

My guess is that since Pennsylvania is a key state for the race, Harris will choose Josh Shapiro.

Given that Trump has JD Vance as VP candidate and Vance is a very good choice, the Democrats will be hard pressed to match that. Vance started life as a country bumpkin, served in the marines, and then graduating summa at Ohio State, as well as Yale Law School. He went on to prove his mettle by becoming a venture capitalist and by the time he was 39, he has shown a personal track record of career success, including becoming a deca-millionaire by that age. And he got into politics and became junior senator in Ohio State. Kamala Harris has no private career achievements of the same magnitude to speak off before she become Biden’s VP, selected more on the basis that she provided diversity to the old man.

And in her job as VP, she also has no major accomplishments of her own to speak of. She is presumptive presidential candidate because her Party has nobody else to choose from. Any transparent contest as per what the NYT recommended last week will end up with a weakened party against which the Republicans will win. Kamala is there for the Democrats to save a sinking ship. And if you believe the propaganda, she has pulled the Party together quickly to face off Trump and Vance.

This is what the BBC says of her:

Three ways Trump is trying to end the Harris honeymoon

7 hours ago

Anthony Zurcher North America correspondent, BBC

At a moment of unprecedented turbulence in modern American political history, Kamala Harris is having a remarkably smooth ride. It may not last long.

Tony Fabrizio, Donald Trump's campaign pollster, calls it a "Harris Honeymoon" – where a combination of good press and positive energy have combined to give the Democrat a surge of momentum.

The thing about honeymoons, of course, is that they come to an end. The realities of married life, or in this case the relationship between Ms Harris and the American voting public, has a way of reasserting itself.

For now, the champagne corks are flying for team Harris and Democrats may be experiencing an unfamiliar emotion – hope. But Republicans, after initially being caught somewhat flatfooted by Mr Biden's historic announcement, are redirecting their fire at the new presumptive nominee.

Here's a look at three areas on which their recent attacks have focused – and some ways Democrats may try to deflect them.

1. Calling Harris a 'radical' leftist

The travails of Ms Harris' unsuccessful campaign for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination are well documented. They include a lack of clear messaging, a campaign rife with internal discord and a candidate who was prone to awkward interviews and gaffes. Something else happened during the then-senator's ill-fated presidential bid, however. She – like many of the candidates in that race – tacked sharply to the left, to be more in line with Democratic primary voters.

"There was a lot of pressure on those guys from the activist base," said Matt Bennett, the executive vice-president for public affairs at Third Way, a centrist Democratic think tank. "When you're competing in a primary, your political priorities are very different than the sprint to the finish in a general election."

Over the course of 2019 – in debates and interviews - Ms Harris endorsed scrapping private health insurance for a government-run system. She praised policing reform, including redirecting law-enforcement budgets to other priorities. She endorsed decriminalising undocumented entry into the US and entertained abolishing Ice, the immigration and customs enforcement agency. She backed the sweeping Green New Deal environmental legislation and supported a ban on fracking and off-shore drilling.

Now those positions could come back to haunt her.

David McCormick, a Republican candidate for Senate in Pennsylvania, was quick to produce a television advertisement hitting on Ms Harris' 2019 positions and tying them to his opponent, Democratic Senator Bob Casey.

And Trump has released a video titled "MEET SAN FRANCISCO RADICAL KAMALA HARRIS" that includes many of the policies she backed during that time.

Conservative commentator Matt Walsh called it a "blueprint" for how to attack the vice-president.

"She can argue, correctly, that good leaders change their position on policy and they don't change her principles," Mr Bennett, the Democratic strategist, said. "None of her principles have changed."

If she doesn't do that convincingly, she could lose support from independent and undecided voters that will determine the outcome of the election in key swing states.

2. Tying Harris to Biden's record

Polls show the Biden campaign had been floundering for months. His immigration policies were unpopular. Even though inflation has eased and the economy is growing, voters still blamed him for higher prices. His ongoing support for Israel in the Gaza War was sapping his support among young voters.

Ms Harris, in her role as vice-president, will at least be somewhat tied to the entirety of the current administration's record – for better or for worse.

Republicans are already trying to hang the immigration issue around her neck, labelling her as the administration's "border czar" – an inaccurate but damaging characterisation that was also used by the media. They cite her past statements on immigration and a claim, during an interview in 2022, that the "border is secure".

"Kamala Harris is currently only known as a failed and unpopular vice-president who knifed her boss in the back to secure a nomination she couldn't earn, but voters are about to learn, it gets worse," Taylor Budowich, who runs the political action committee affiliated with the Trump campaign, said in a statement touting \$32m in upcoming television advertisements targeting the vice-president.

Migrant arrivals and detentions are down after historic highs earlier in Biden's term

According to Mr Bennett, Ms Harris won't be able to fully distance herself from the Biden record, but she might be able to put it in new light for voters, even in the face of Republican attacks.

"What she can do is make this about the future in ways that were going to be very difficult for an 81-year-old guy to do," he says. "She can argue that Trump wants only to look backward."

3. Attacking her years as a prosecutor

In the first public rally of her presidential campaign, Ms Harris unveiled a particularly pointed line of attack against the former president. Noting that she had served as a courtroom prosecutor and as California's attorney general, she said she had faced off against "perpetrators of all kinds".

"So hear me when I say I know Donald Trump's type," she concluded.

Craig Varoga, a Democratic campaign consultant and adjunct instructor at American University, calls the vice-president's law-enforcement background her "superpower" –

one that she was not fully able to use on the Democratic campaign trail in 2019, when policing reform was a top issue.

But Trump's campaign is already showing signs on how they might respond. His campaign manager, Chris LaCivita, made his bones in the Republican Party by taking on another Democratic candidate's supposed superpower and turning it against him.

Back in 2004, Democratic nominee John Kerry was touting his record as a decorated Vietnam War veteran as proof that he would be an effective commander-in-chief during the Iraq War. Mr LaCivita spearheaded a series of attack adverts questioning Mr Kerry's patriotism and heroism, featuring sailors who served with Kerry on a Navy swift boat patrolling the rivers and shorelines in Vietnam.

It gave rise to the term "Swift-boating" – which means to disarm a candidate by attacking their perceived strength.

And it looks like Trump's campaign is gearing up for attacks on the vice-president's prosecutorial record.

On one hand, they are hitting her for being too tough – particularly on black men for drug crimes – in an attempt to undermine support from her base. On the other, they are citing instances where Ms Harris either chose not to prosecute or allowed the parole of individuals who went on to commit new crimes.

Mr Varoga concedes that Democrats botched their response to the Swift-boat attacks in 2004, but he says they've learned their lesson and Ms Harris will be ready for the onslaught.

"If LaCivita thinks he's going to fool the entire Democratic establishment again, he can live with that delusion and also lose," he said.

A race to define Harris

In his memo, Mr Fabrizio said that Ms Harris "can't change who she is or what she's done". He promised that voters will soon view her as Mr Biden's "partner and co-pilot" and learn about her "dangerously liberal record".

The upcoming advertising onslaught, along with Trump's public statements and rally attacks, will be the tip of this Republican spear.

Meanwhile, Ms Harris and her campaign will work to offer their own definition of who the candidate is and what she stands for.

One particularly effective way to do this, according to Mr Varoga, is with her selection of a vice-presidential running mate.

“It’s the first real decision that a candidate for president makes that’s out there for the public to see,” he said. “That will go a long way toward people understanding what kind of future she’s going to pursue.”

If she opts for a more moderate partner, it could make voters more inclined to believe that she will govern from the centre, rather than as the leftist candidate Republicans make her out to be.

In the weeks ahead, the fight to define Ms Harris – through her word, through her votes and through her past campaigns – will go a long way towards determining how the public views her when they head to the ballot box in November.

It will shape whether the honeymoon ends in heartbreak for Democrats or a union that lasts for the next four years.

In American politics, strategies are important. Already, one can find these pundits commenting on political strategies for both sides. In a sense, everyone knows Trump but Harris has still to be discovered. I have found the following discussion in Politico which tries to comment on both sides of the conversation, even though it is still left leaning:

Can Harris Pull Off a Victory in Three Months? Three Top Strategists Lay Out How - Politico

We convened a roundtable with former campaign managers and strategists to ask them about Harris and Trump’s biggest vulnerabilities, how her entrance shakes up the electoral map and their Election Day predictions.

By CHARLIE MAHTESIAN
07/26/2024 05:00 AM EDT

Charlie Mahtesian is a senior politics editor at POLITICO.

On Sunday, President Joe Biden dropped out of the presidential race and endorsed his vice president, Kamala Harris, effectively kicking off one of the shortest campaigns in modern political history. With only three full months to go before Election Day, Harris has an ultra-compressed timeline in which to build a policy platform, refine her message and define herself as a candidate to voters.

How do you run a three-month campaign in an era when presidential campaigns have become yearslong affairs? We gathered three top campaign managers to ask just that. We spoke with Patti Solis Doyle, who ran Hillary Clinton’s 2008 presidential primary campaign; Robby Mook, who ran Clinton’s 2016 general election campaign; and Stuart Stevens, lead strategist in Mitt Romney’s 2012 presidential campaign.

In an hourlong roundtable discussion, the three drew on decades of campaign experience to hash out how Harris should define herself in opposition to Trump; how she should attack rather than go on defense or respond if Trump resorts to racist and sexist attacks; what her path to 270 electoral votes might look like; and who her VP

pick should be. On that last one, all seemed to point in the direction of one governor in a key battleground state. “**If I were on the campaign and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro brought me half a point,**” Mook said, “I really want that half a point, because that might be the half a point you win the state by.”

The conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.

OUR PANELISTS

ROBBY MOOK

Campaign manager, Hillary Clinton 2016

PATTI SOLIS DOYLE

Campaign manager, Hillary Clinton 2008

STUART STEVENS

Lead strategist, Mitt Romney 2012

What should Kamala Harris do differently in this campaign than in her unsuccessful 2020 campaign?

Patti Solis Doyle: I feel kind of odd offering any advice because she seems to not really need it. The last 72 hours have been unbelievable in terms of rollout. She locked up the nomination. Within 36 hours, she got the delegates. She got the endorsements from Congress. She got the money. And her first events have been through the roof.

I think she’s doing it. I think she is being forceful in her prosecution of Trump. I think she’s offering a hopeful view of the future. I think she’s doing the politics right.

Robby Mook: Your question is interesting because my initial reaction is, a primary campaign and a general election campaign, particularly one only 14 weeks out, are just totally different. But she’s brilliantly set up here because the staff were hired; the fundraising apparatus is in place; the politics are done; the nomination is secured. It’s like she turned the first 10 months into two days.

There’s a paradox here. This is a really short campaign, and that is great, because she is rested. She is ready to go. I think time is often your enemy on these, particularly as a quasi-incumbent. But on the other hand, time is short, so the imperative is to lock in, first of all, who is she? And second of all, what is her vision?

I think she’s done a very good job rolling that out right out of the gate. But there’s a question about calcifying that and pushing it deep. And we know that these — they used to be called double-haters but I think they’re just persuadable-again or either-way voters — we know that they have the least information about her and they get their news disproportionately from social media. One advantage she really has that we didn’t have on the Clinton campaign, and I don’t think Joe Biden really had, is the internet is a really safe space for her right now. It’s a great safe space for people to express support for her. So that’s great.

But the Harris campaign has got to drive that advantage because we're already seeing the GOP going on TV. It's almost like it's March 15th — it's after Super Tuesday, she's secured the nomination. What can happen? The incumbent, which in this case is Trump, is going to try to go in and define you right away. And the Harris team has got to resist that. They've got to have that strategy, get it on the air and drive it in. And that's the test, I think, over the next month.

Stuart Stevens: I think I would challenge the premise of the question that she didn't run a good campaign because she didn't win. Because most people *don't* win. And she did end up on the ticket, which is the next best thing you can do. She won a very tough race for attorney general. She's vice president of the United States, and now she's the Democratic nominee for president. So how far would she have gone if she was a good politician?

Defining the narrative

By virtue of her position as vice president, many voters still don't actually know her. How should Kamala Harris define herself?

Robby Mook: I think the challenge for her is going to be there's this really tricky dynamic with the electorate right now. On one hand, the economy is doing really well. And on the other hand, people, particularly the folks she needs to bring in to win this election, are really unhappy with the economy. They're very on edge. And the world has become much more seemingly dangerous and volatile. And she's sort of an incumbent, but not totally. So she's going to have to really address head-on that agitation in the electorate, because it's very easy for Trump to say, "If you don't like the way things are, time for a change," right? And while Trump's policies caused inflation, he wasn't president when the inflation that his policies caused came into effect. So I think that's going to be the maze she'll have to navigate.

Patti Solis Doyle: My first presidential campaign was Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign. And for a lot of reasons, he didn't actually get the nomination until very, very late into the primary process. Which meant we had a very short general election. And that was a blessing in many, many ways.

Stuart Stevens: I think this is a chance to really pose the question of, "Who are we?" To say that there are two competing visions of what America should be — a guy who wants to ban Muslims and says immigrants are murderers and rapists, or someone who embodies what the American dream is about.

I've always felt that when President Biden was still in this, that there had to be two things that needed to be accomplished that were critical to winning. One was that the Democratic candidate needed to represent the future. And it's clear that the Harris campaign understands that. I mean, you're running against a guy who's against all mandatory vaccines in schools. So, like, that's the pro-polio camp, the pro-whooping-cough camp, pro-measles. I think that's a pretty small group. And the Democratic candidate needed to be the safe choice.

I think the model for this in a lot of ways is the Obama campaign in '08. They did a magnificent job in setting it up so that when you voted for Barack Obama, it said

something about who you were and what you wanted the country to be, not just who you wanted to be president. And I think that's the challenge that Harris should run right into.

And I think the Trump campaign is completely ill-equipped to deal with this. Trump hates women, JD Vance hates women. They don't know how to talk about women. And I think tonally, they're going to be completely off as they have been in the past 72 hours.

Patti Solis Doyle: Robby and I have had the experience of trying to elect the first woman president of the United States and failing. With Hillary, she was predefined, and she came with a lot of baggage. Harris doesn't have that burden. And it's a real, real opportunity. And I couldn't agree more with Stuart that they're not going to know how to handle her. They're just not going to know how to approach her, how to engage with her, how to define her. Hillary was a lot easier to do that with. And I think they're not going to know what to make of her.

Attacking Trump's weaknesses

What are the biggest vulnerabilities that you see in terms of how Trump will attack her? And is there anything specific in the Biden record that her campaign will want to avoid or should avoid?

Robby Mook: We're seeing change elections everywhere around the globe right now. In Britain, it was from conservative to Labour, and in France, we saw the two poles against the center. In India, we saw change. So I do think they're going to have the wind at their back on this question of change. I do think that's an opportunity for Harris because I think she is her own person. She can both reach back to the accomplishments of the administration and talk about what's worth protecting, but she can also propose a new direction. We've already seen that: She talked about pre-K and elder care and so on — new ideas that weren't really associated with Biden.

I also just can't emphasize enough how we've had so much change coming from the right via the Supreme Court, particularly the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. So I think also this question of change is an opportunity for her to say there's been a lot of really bad changes, and we need to push back on that. And we saw her doing that, just in the last two days.

Patti Solis Doyle: The two issues the Trump campaign is going to drive hard — and I would, too, if I were them — are the economy/inflation/cost of living and the border and immigration. It's going to be very difficult for her to sort of disassociate herself from the Biden administration and the Biden record on those two issues, particularly the border because she was ostensibly put in charge of that early on in the administration.

But at the same time, I agree with Robby that she can pivot. She absolutely can pivot to her vision of the future. I think we're going to see inflation get much better between now and the election.

The third issue that is very prominent is women's reproductive rights. And she can just own that and really drive it all the way through the general election. So on the issues, I think she's fairly well positioned. But ironically, this has been sort of an issue-less campaign thus far. This has been all about Biden being too old and Trump being a criminal. And we haven't really talked about our vision for policy priorities, et cetera. I think Kamala will be able to pivot there as well.

Stuart Stevens: If I were on the Harris campaign, I would attack Donald Trump on his record with immigration. It was a total failure. Barack Obama deported more people than Trump. Trump said he was going to have Mexico pay for a wall. I would go in and say he's the greatest failure that we've had. And that's what the Biden administration handled. I would not defend; I would attack on that. But the bottom line is that if this is a referendum on immigration, it's not going to be a great day for the Harris campaign. So you have to switch.

And if you look at that 100-day plan that the president rolled out in Michigan after the debate, which I thought was beautifully done and timed ... and if you take Project 2025 and what Republicans were talking about at that convention ... I mean, one tests about 80/20 to the good, and the other tests about 20/80 to the bad. So it's not hard to take that 80/20 and run it against the 20/80. And do that all day. And I would attack, attack, attack. I think I'd run maybe one positive ad and the rest would be contrasts.

So what's her strongest message here then? Is it the anti-Trump focus or is it pro-abortion rights? Is it something else? Change?

Stuart Stevens: To me, her strongest message is, "I am more like America than Donald Trump is," which is true. Republicans keep getting into these culture wars, and they lose. They attack Nike and Colin Kaepernick. What happens? Nike makes \$9 billion. They get in a fight with Disney? The happiness company? They're sort of at war with the modern world, and I think you have to just bet on that. There's more of her than there are of them. I would make that bet and take that bet.

"Trump's superpower is marketing. I think it's fraud, but it's marketing, and he's good at it. ... My hope is that she will compete just as much as he can in that space."

—Robby Mook

Robby Mook: I think she's going to need to talk to people's pocketbooks at least somewhat. I think any presidential candidate ignores that at their peril. I think you're going to start to hear her talking more about how Trump went in front of a bunch of oil executives and said, "You give my campaign \$1 billion, I'll give you whatever you want." We'll hear more about that, but also more about what she's done for people. There's a lot in the IRA — at least hundreds of thousands of jobs that have been created. I would put abortion in a special lane. I think that issue transcends in a way. It was such a rupture in our national policy. And it is so powerful that I think it deserves a special place in the messaging of the campaign.

On the other side of that coin, how hard should Harris be going after Trump? And how should she be responding to his more caustic attacks, particularly the ones that are going to have racist or sexist undertones, either from Trump or surrogates for his campaign?

Patti Solis Doyle: I think she should attack him and contrast with him every opportunity she has. Every day, 20 hours a day. In terms of how she reacts to his racist, sexist, misogynist attacks on her, I would just not even go there. Do not take the bait.

Robby Mook: I think Patti brings up an important point there, because I think sometimes when you do, it makes it about you. But she can have surrogates, certainly, push back on that.

On campaigns, there's positive advertising and there's negative advertising. I do think in many ways, this is shaping up to be a contrast campaign. It is not enough to just say, "Well, here's what I think," and then you wait. It's really, "Here's what I think, and here's what the other person thinks, and here's why I have a better deal."

Stuart Stevens: Yeah, I mean, I think she just shrugs and says: "Is that all you got?" and just makes fun of it. That is a base play when they're doing that. They're basically telling jokes that they think are funny, that most people don't think are funny, and you can't make them think that it's not funny. You just have to bet that most of the people don't think it's funny.

Patti Solis Doyle: I'm going to lose my Hillary card on this one. But Hillary was a very polarizing figure. So when Trump called her a nasty woman, half of the country was kind of like, "Oh, yeah, she kind of is," and that's not the case with Kamala Harris. She doesn't have that sort of polarized perception from the American people. I think she can bring more people into the tent if he chooses to attack her in that way.

Gaming out a path to 270

I wonder if I could change directions a little bit here and talk a little bit about the Electoral College and the best map to 270 for Harris. One could argue that Harris has particular strengths that might reopen the Sun Belt path that seemed to be closed for Joe Biden. Am I off-base there?

Robby Mook: I do think there's potential for the Sun Belt to open up a little bit. I think Arizona has remained in the hunt. I think the question was really more about Georgia and North Carolina and where they stood. And if Harris is able to drive up support with African American voters, that's really key to pulling those states back in. To state the obvious, they're so important because those states can replace losing, for example, in Wisconsin. But, and this is, to me, the key to the Electoral College: I don't see a way that either candidate probably wins without winning Pennsylvania. It's 19 electoral votes. I don't see where else you get those. So I think we're going to definitely see a focus on the so-called Blue Wall and on the Sun Belt. But gosh, if I were sitting in that campaign, Pennsylvania is a must-win.

Patti Solis Doyle: Almost immediately, with the Harris announcement, I think two things happened. One, it stopped the hemorrhaging. It was a tourniquet on all the support we were losing in the Blue Wall. The second thing she's done is shore up the base and our coalition of Black people, brown people, young people, women. And by bringing those folks in — we won't know until we see some credible polling in the next week or 10 days — but I believe strongly that we're going to close the gap in those Rust Belt states as well, which gives us more paths to 270. It was very nerve-wracking to only have one path to 270 when we had Biden at the top of the ticket. And I think Harris, with whoever her VP selection is going to be, gives us more optionality and opportunity.

Stuart Stevens: Republicans have won Pennsylvania once since 1988. And that was with Trump. So I don't think there's anything that's happened inside Pennsylvania politics that has made it more likely that Trump would win now. I think it's the opposite. This Trump-like candidate ran for governor and got crushed. You have a very popular governor who seems to be pretty good at politics. Demographically, the state has not trended in a way that would be unfavorable, I think. And you have a very fractured Republican Party in that state. So I like the odds Democrats can win it.

How about from a campaign mechanics standpoint, within this compressed time frame, what doesn't the vice president have time to do that a normal campaign would? What can't she do now because of the nature of the time left?

Robby Mook: You could argue they lost some time in fundraising in July, and time matters for fundraising. But, gosh, I'd like to think that was made up for in the last few days when they broke \$100 million. So I'm not concerned about that.

She has a staff in place. It was a prepared, capable campaign that had plenty of time to get set up. The DNC and the party were in good shape. She is vastly outmatching Trump on ground game right now. The only things I could point to is it would be nice to have more time to think about a VP, but I think the ones she's looking at are excellent. And I just don't think that's really going to have much impact.

I don't see a lot of downside, personally.

Patti Solis Doyle: I agree with you. She's not starting from scratch; she inherited a campaign apparatus and structure. I don't think she really has the burden of not having enough time. I like the sprint to Election Day from now until November. I think it works to her advantage.

The stakes of the veepstakes

Okay, let's talk about vice presidential options. Who do you think has the biggest upside for Kamala Harris? And are there any prospective candidates out there who haven't been mentioned that might have a catalytic effect?

Patti Solis Doyle: I think you've got to view it from the prism of what do you actually need? What are the goalposts that you need to be able to clear? First,

obviously the person has to be able to do the job, should something happen. I think all the people that she's looking at check that box. Then there's who helps you electorally. I think all the people she's looking at check that box. And then, there's the chemistry. I don't put a lot of stake in that just because the very nature of the relationship is that there's just tension there, right? I mean, I don't think Bill Clinton and Al Gore got along very well, and I don't think Barack Obama and Biden got along very well. There's just natural tension in that dynamic. Then there's the balancing of the narrative. For Kamala in particular, I think you're looking for someone who's a little more moderate, who's a little whiter, who's a little maler. I think all the people on her list do that.

Robby Mook: We were talking about Pennsylvania being paramount to the math of the Electoral College. I'm in the camp that doesn't believe the VP choice makes a whole lot of difference, but if I were on the campaign and Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro brought me half a point, I really want that half a point, because that might be the half a point you win the state by, right? It was won and lost by so little in the last two cycles. So that I just find interesting. Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly to me is also interesting. Unfortunately, his wife was the victim of an assassination attempt. He is such a unique American. And his military service, being an astronaut. But any of the people being talked about I think would be very solid.

Stuart Stevens: You know, if you held a gun to my head and said who to pick, my heart would say Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. And my brain would say Shapiro.

Patti Solis Doyle: That's what heart and head would say, too.

What it will take on Election Day

If you had to guess who wins the presidency, and you could have just one post-election data point to make that call, what would that data point be? I'm talking about, is it turnout in Philadelphia? In Detroit? Is it turnout in Madison? Is it TV spending? Is it fundraising? What would that one data point be that you'd want to have in making that call, if you could have only one?

Robby Mook: I would say Bucks County, Pennsylvania. If that's just not where it needs to be, then that's probably a pretty good bellwether.

Patti Solis Doyle: I'm shocked this is coming out of my mouth because two weeks ago, I was despondent, but I think Kamala Harris is going to win this election. And that's because the double-haters now have an alternative. They don't have to hold their nose and either vote for Trump or hold their nose and vote for Biden. They have an alternative that is pretty amazing. The way they shift in the battleground states is going to call it.

Stuart Stevens: The one data point I'd look at is the white vote. Trump has to get 58 or north of the white vote to have a chance in this race. His coalition was 85 percent white in 2020 in a country that is 60, 59 percent white — less so since we've been talking. If Trump gets 54 percent of the white vote, this thing is going to be a rout.

He's got to get closer to 60. There's one dynamic I think we don't focus on enough here: He lost by 7 million votes in 2020. He needs new customers. So where is he getting those new customers? And I don't think he is. And I think that's why he keeps getting stuck at this number. This guy has won one election in his life with 46.2 percent of the vote. Romney lost with 47.2 percent of the vote. He would have to crush numbers with white turnout. And I think he's not because I think he's going to lose the higher-educated white voters who would have voted Republican in a lot of local races and can't stomach Trump.

Robby Mook: I need to mark the tape. I do believe that Harris will win, but Stuart brought up an important point here, which is back in the day, if there was exceptionally high turnout, that was really good for Democrats. And I think that equation is starting to change. And so, Stuart, I hadn't thought about it this way until you said this, but I think his best source of new customers is turnout. And you were alluding to that.

I think that's part of why he picked Vance. If on Election Day we're seeing exceptionally high turnout, that's a bellwether that's helpful for Trump. We saw this in 2016; Florida looked like it was in the bag for Hillary going into Election Day. And then the turnout on Election Day was exceptionally high.

The next article is an impassioned plea from the editorial board of the NYT for more debates so that voters can understand better who they are getting as president. It speaks for itself. I personally don't see the point because Trump will trump Harris in any such showdown. Harris is neither eloquent nor speaks well on important issues. At least, I have heard no such thing.

Americans Deserve More Debates and Transparency in This Election

July 26, 2024 **By The Editorial Board New York Times**

The editorial board is a group of opinion journalists whose views are informed by expertise, research, debate and certain longstanding values. It is separate from the newsroom.

Vice President Kamala Harris, now the likely Democratic nominee, has the chance to encourage and embrace the kind of close examination that the public so far has had little opportunity to witness during the 2024 race.

Americans deserve a campaign that tests the strengths and weaknesses of the candidates; that highlights their differences and allows scrutiny of their plans; that motivates people to vote by giving them a clear account of how their choice in this election will affect their lives.

Americans deserve the opportunity to ask questions of those who are seeking to lead their government.

There are promising signs in the early days of Ms. Harris's candidacy. She has bounced onto the campaign trail with a sense of joyful purpose, seizing the opening to reintroduce herself. She has begun to detail the dangers of a second Trump

presidency and to delineate her differences with Donald Trump, while describing her vision for a country where people have the support they need to prosper.

But she needs to do more, and she needs to do it quickly. Ms. Harris ought to challenge Mr. Trump to a series of debates or town halls on subjects of national importance, such as the economy, foreign policy, health care and immigration. Mr. Trump claims that he is ready and willing to participate in debates once Democrats have officially selected a nominee. Americans would benefit from comparing the two candidates directly.

Both candidates need to start taking questions from reporters, too. Candidates have abundant opportunities to speak directly to voters, through social media and tightly controlled public appearances, without the mediation of journalists. Most voters, however, will never be able to speak directly with candidates. President Biden has rarely granted the news media permission to ask questions on behalf of the American people, and on the rare occasions he did, his team sometimes sent scripted questions. It left him poorly prepared for the campaign trail and for confronting his opponent. Mr. Trump, too, rarely takes questions. Ms. Harris has the chance to do better.

Engaging with voters is especially important for Ms. Harris because she would be the first major-party presidential candidate in modern times who did not pass through the state primary process, in which voters have a chance to take the measure of candidates and to ask questions about the issues that matter most to their communities.

Ms. Harris's candidacy does not require legitimation. She is the clear choice of her party. An Ipsos poll this week found that 89 percent of Democrats supported her running as the party's nominee. But addressing small crowds in small places and answering questions from local reporters are rituals during the primaries for a reason. Unlike large public rallies, they are occasions for encounters on equal footing, and they are an education for the candidate as much as for voters.

With debates and town halls, Ms. Harris would also have an opportunity to draw an even starker contrast with Mr. Trump. Presidential campaigns increasingly are conducted as performances before a sympathetic audience, one that is invited to watch and listen but not to question or respond. The false intimacy of social media gives the impression that candidates are more present than ever in the lives of their supporters, but those relationships are one-way streets. Candidates are seen by the electorate but they do not see; they are heard but they do not hear.

Mr. Trump, who speaks mostly about Mr. Trump, is an extreme example of this tendency — and it is a perfect embodiment of his politics. If Trump campaign officials were reluctant to have their candidate appear at large outside rallies in the wake of the assassination attempt against him, no one would question that fear. His campaign, however, continues to exist primarily as a series of long, winding speeches that offer no insight into how he would end the war in Ukraine or how he would solve the crisis at the border, two of the many goals he has promised to accomplish if re-elected. The former president has barely been pressed on important policy questions or offered any concrete plans.

Both candidates say they are running for office to help ordinary Americans. One way for Americans to judge those claims is by their campaigns. Good leaders speak, and they listen. They welcome scrutiny. They accept responsibility. Ms. Harris now has a chance to demonstrate that she will be the kind of leader who deserves the nation's support.

YWC's take:

There is way too much information everywhere (mainstream and social media) on the events of the last three weeks, starting with the presidential campaign that derailed Biden's chances for a second term. There are new polls every hour on the state of the electoral college, and at this time, all of them point to Trump beating the Democrats by a good margin. Most polls are either pro Republican which predicts a electoral college landslide or they are pro Democratic Party which predicts that Harris is leading a comeback, after the disastrous showing by Biden.

With that said, it is a little too early to heed any of them since there was a fundamental change when they dropped Biden. This has still not been fully understood by the voters. After all, Biden gave another "I am the cadaver" appearance in his Thursday attempt to give an explanation why he stepped down. If he is still important, that would have killed his chances - again. But nobody cares about what he says anymore.

If we are closer to the Democratic convention say in mid August, the polls would be more predictive. And if we are looking at these polls a month before the elections, say in October, they will likely be very accurate. Right now, we are flying by the seat of our pants.

Still, my understanding is that Kamala Harris is not an easy person to work with. According to observers, there has been a 94% turnover in her staff both as VP and as Senator. That cannot be good for her. In short, she may not be able to keep the talent necessary to stay focused on beating Trump.

Then although the Democrats are shouting at the top of their voices that there is now "energy" in her campaign, I don't know if this matters too much. Trump provided the world a glimpse of his energy in the minutes after the assassination attempt, when he seems like he was single-handedly setting up the Iwo Jima memorial. That was real energy which will last for a while.

Harris's own unpopularity as VP is a problem. Before last weekend, nobody liked her. She was pictured as the person who has a cackling hyena like, un-presidential laugh. Who needs that?

And even the most astute pundits have commented that she is not experienced enough to handle the economy or foreign policy. On both, she has no independent views of her own yet; and she is defined entirely by her boss Biden. The economy? Well, that's a 35 trillion dollar national debt which must lead to inflation, a problem that will erode the support for her. On diplomacy, her foreign visits to allies in the past have been ridiculed. What is her position on the war in Ukraine? Or on the Middle East? Or on China? More war? At least in the case of Trump, we already know what he stands for. All we have heard from Kamala was some vague statement so far as presidential candidate that her country loves freedom. That is too vague to be a valuable guide to her thinking. Fortunately for her, the country does not care much about foreign policy as an election issue, unless the country is turning away from military conflict, as it did in 1968 when LBJ was deeply detested for his

expansion of the Vietnam War. Today, there is no affinity for the Israeli war in the Gaza and if she is seen to be like Biden, supporting Netanyahu, it will be minus points for her campaign. Biden was hoping for a Ukrainian victory that would generate gather-around-the-flag moment to help his image as a war president, but Harris has demonstrated no such inclination to be inspiring patriotism and showing any passion for American military exploits.

At the end of the day, it will be her stated policies on the economy that may make or break her bid for the presidency. Both Biden and Vance are clear about what they want to do – make America great again in manufacturing industry. Harris? We don't know yet. Keep in mind she is from California, and politicians there, including her have totally screwed up that economy. San Francisco, her hometown is a disaster, with fentanyl addicts walking zombie-like around homeless camps in the streets. Can she put distance between her background and the preference the rest of the middle class in the country have for better jobs and lower inflation? It remains to be seen.

I am still betting Trump will be the 47th President of the United States.

Yeong, Wai-Cheong, CFA

Fintech Entrepreneur, Money Manager and Blogger

Un-Influencer in a World full of Hubris

We no longer distribute the weekly commentary by email. It will be posted on our website. However, if you wish to receive it delivered to you, please let Wai Cheong know and he will send it to you by What'sApp. His What'sApp is 96873181.