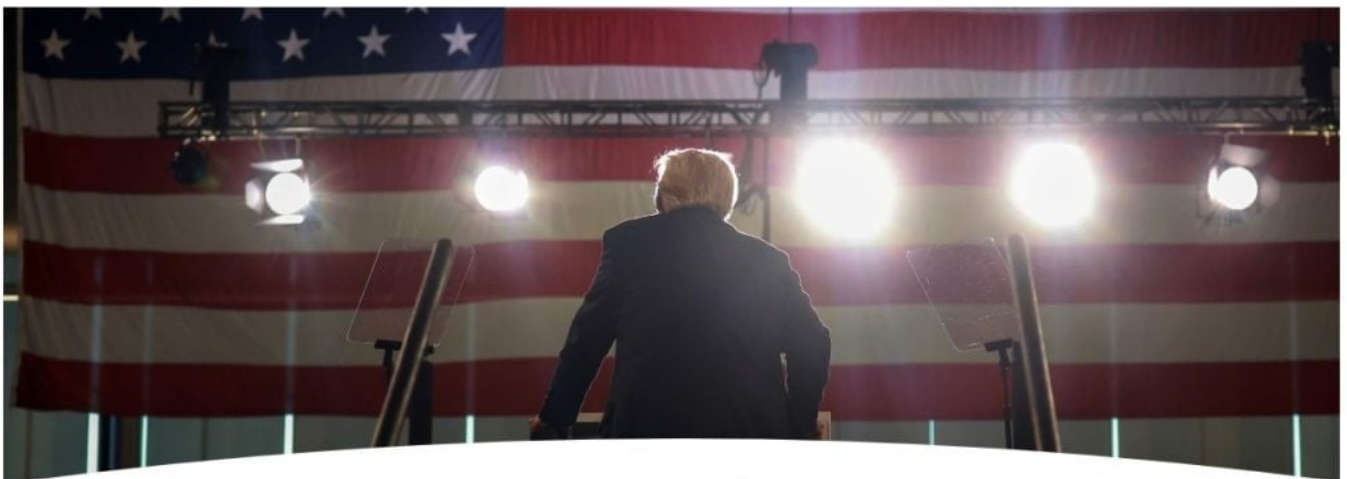


How Trump Can Win—or Lose—the Election

By Victor Davis Hanson

The good news for the Trump campaign is that the sure Democratic nominee Kamala Harris is a lifelong California hard leftist at a time when the state is emblematic of progressive nihilism. Her extremist advocacies as a San Francisco county and city attorney, state Attorney General, and senator are on record. And they are consistent with what has virtually destroyed the state.



Harris was also a driving force as vice president for Joe Biden's unpopular and unworkable progressive policies—whether open borders, massive illegal immigration, hyperinflation, fanning woke divisiveness, arguing for lax criminal prosecution, or defunding the police. She was far closer to the mindset of the unhinged Squad than Joe Biden himself.

None of the Biden-Harris administration's main policy initiatives ever polled 50 percent approval. Abroad, the world blew up under their tenure with an unbridled Putin invading Ukraine, an unbound Iran brazenly using its proxies to attack Israel, and China all but warning the West of its impending

absorption of Taiwan—now not a question of if but only when.

So, it should be easy for Trump to win the key midwestern swing states. All he needs to do is repeatedly remind voters that Harris is the most far-left presidential candidate in modern history. He can drive home that she is not only on record endorsing these extreme positions but has been doing so emphatically for years to energize her exclusively left-wing constituents and audiences.

If Trump heeds the lessons of late Lee Atwater, then he need only follow the 1988 Republican campaign script, when hard-left Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis's 17-point lead in late July melted through nonstop reminders that Dukakis was and always would be far to the left of the American voter.

Dukakis's efforts to claim that the election was only about his "competence," not his liberal ideology, evaporated after a devastating series of ads—exposing the "technocrat" Dukakis as an extremist and a hypocrite desperate to disown and hide his prior unapologetically left-wing record from the voters. And Dukakis was a far better candidate than Harris.

The Bad News

However, the bad news for Trump is that there are only roughly 90 days left to expose Harris's extremist record. And like cognitively challenged Joe Biden in 2020, her handlers will not allow her to speak extemporaneously or to give interviews to real journalists.

She will hide her innate silliness and her extreme record and instead teleprompt a scripted persona and pseudo-centrist agenda to the nation.

There is, then, almost no time to redefine the reclusive Harris, given she was never a candidate for 2024 nomination. She stuck by the hard lie that Joe Biden was "fit as a fiddle" until he wasn't and was selected by party bosses and billionaires at a historically late stage of the campaign.

That was not a drawback given her hard-left vulnerabilities, but an advantage given that it was always much easier to hide the real Harris in three months than for over two years.

In addition, she will vastly outspend the Trump campaign—given that her youth, gender, and race contrast positively with the admittedly enfeebled octogenarian Biden and his increasing snark, crankiness, and off-putting incoherence.

And finally, she is a tempting personal target that naturally irks Trump. So, he has risen to the bait to respond in kind to the sort of personal vitriol that has long been directed at him and now running mate J.D. Vance. When politicians, like the governor of Illinois, stoop to lie that Vance had sexual intercourse with a couch, then there are now no limits on anything.

Harris is certainly a “DEI” candidate. In the hysteria following the death of George Floyd and the months-long riots of 2020, Joe Biden pandered to his hard-left base that had orchestrated his nomination by forcing the withdrawal of his non-electable primary rivals by promising that he would select a black vice president who would likely be a woman.

Those racial and gender fixations explained why Biden selected Harris, who otherwise had a dismal and brief senate career. As a candidate herself, she had failed to win a single primary or a single delegate and withdrew in humiliation from the 2019-20 race without even entering a primary or caucus.

During the violent days of the summer of 2020’s rioting, arson, and looting, Harris virtue signaled her eagerness to get on the presidential ticket in ways that would have proved impossible on her own merits, apparently by pandering to the hard-left BLM/Antifa base.

So, she loudly helped to raise money to bail out Minnesota rioters and looters. She bragged on CBS that protests (that had long proved violent and had led to deaths and hundreds of

injured law enforcement officers) would and should not cease. And thus, we, the American people, she boasted, should “beware” that the unrest would continue up to and beyond Election Day. That warning is about as provocatively left-wing as it gets in American politics and was far more reckless than anything Trump said on January 6. Yet apparently her radical incitement either helped, or was excused, in her appointment as Biden’s running mate

Moreover, Harris has indeed played the race card, sometimes presenting herself as the “first” California Indian-American senator, sometimes altering her accent to a black patois to emphasize her supposedly authentic black credentials—as the child of an immigrant, Jamaican, and Stanford professor father.

There are other tempting but dead-end Trump targets.

Given that his lead over Biden had been growing weekly and given the president’s exponential rate of cognitive decline, it was natural to keep harping on Biden as the “worst” president in U.S. history. As Trump put it, the entire Biden tenure really was a “disaster”—and thus, logically and by extension, so was Harris’s role in that calamity of an administration.

So, all these ad hominem, name-calling targets are naturally attractive. But in the few weeks left (early voting in some states is scheduled to begin in mere days), they remain dead-ends, distractions, and time-wasters.

Proving Harris is a DEI selection, a woke opportunist, a hypocrite, an utter incompetent, childlike, and indistinguishable from Joe Biden won’t win Trump a single additional MAGA vote in the swing states or one new Trump-hating Democrat.

But these ad hominem distractions will bore or even bother independent voters as they hear endless media-ginned-up

controversies and psychodramas that Trump is “cruel,” “mean,” and “racist.” At best, Trump will achieve a draw with the Trump-hating media and, at worst, sacrifice precious time and opportunities better spent warning Americans of the Harris record.

Trump, again, must force Harris to come clean by either reemphasizing her lifelong extreme positions or be exposed as a flip-flopping opportunist, scrambling to reinvent herself in the fashion of a losing George McGovern, Mike Dukakis, or Jimmy Carter.

Getting tangled up in Harris’s woke and racial contortions, her opportunistically amorous past, and her bouts of cacklerhea will only suggest that Trump is desperate and playing into the hands of the woke victimization narratives.

Trump must instead hammer away that Biden-Harris has left us with a \$1.2 trillion yearly interest bill on the debt, higher interest rates, 10 million unaudited illegal and often dangerous aliens, a nonexistent border, and prices on staples essential to life—key foods, fuels, power, housing, insurance, and health care—20 to 30 percent higher than when Biden took office.

He should ask Harris, “You own these policies, so why are you suddenly ashamed rather than proud of what you did?” Harris bragged that she was “proud” to have been the last person in the room with Biden on the decision to flee in disgrace from Afghanistan.

So, Trump should ask, “Then why did both of you abandon to the Taliban terrorists over 70,000 American trucks, armored vehicles, and Humvees, as well over a half-million heavy machine guns, automatic pistols, and assault weapons, along with over 100 planes and helicopters and nearly 200,000 assorted night-vision goggles, sophisticated radios, and artillery pieces?”

In our dangerous world, with an explosive Middle East, a belligerent Russia, and an oil-thirsty China, the best way to protect American energy interests and independence is not to ban fracking and horizontal drilling, stop the development of natural gas production, or mandate electric vehicles and implement the Green New Deal.

Once upon a time, the Republicans revealed to the country just how far left a nice enough George McGovern was, just how out of touch and hard leftist gentleman Mike Dukakis was, and just how unstable and unsustainable the world was that an upright Jimmy Carter had left America. Landslide rejections of those leftist agendas followed.

So, show all the clips of a word salad Harris struggling to achieve minimum coherence—but always in the context of her espousal of agendas that no one today wants.

Let the left talk of her “diversity” and being “the first female and black vice president” and the pathbreaking “black and Indian nominee” until the American people are weary of cheap woke pandering.

And let Trump simply answer, “She is the diversity candidate; I am the unity candidate. I want to help all Americans recover from the recent nightmare by offering them policies that improve their livelihoods, their freedoms, their security, and their unity with one another.”

A final note. As long as Joe Biden selfishly deceived the American people about his mental decline, as long as the president barked and snarked out his divisive Phantom-of-the-Opera, semi-fascist, and anti-MAGA speeches, as long as he demagogued to win a midterm or reelection by draining the strategic petroleum reserve, cancelling student debt, or offering amnesties, the more the people were sick of him and wanted him out.

But Biden now?

Our president is an isolated, crushed figure. He was cruelly ambushed by the very forces that had fixed his nomination in 2020 by forcing out his rivals and employing him as a ceremonial veneer for their otherwise unpalatable hard-left agendas. So just as Joe lived by the 2020 coup, so his career perished by the 2024 sequel.

Thus, Trump need not constantly pound a now impotent and increasingly irrelevant Biden with the self-evident and obvious: that he was a “horrible “president” and a “disaster.”

America knows that. It is relieved that Biden has only six months left to endanger us.

But given Biden’s diminished capacity, his visible frailty, and his seclusion, how does Trump beat Harris by beating a proverbial dead horse?

For the first time in his life, the now-neutered Biden may even gain public sympathy for his feebleness—especially as the Orwellian left narrative factory churns out new pretexts that a “courageous” Joe Biden “voluntarily” stepped down “for the good of the country” and is now a “George Washington figure.”

A Way Forward?

Again, focus on the disastrous Biden governance of the last four years. Make Harris own it. And contrast it with 2017-21 and what will follow in 2025.

But cease with the invective that he was demented, his already old debate as the worst in history, and his tenure an utter disaster.

Trump is no longer running against a has-been caretaker, whose implosion appeals to the innate sympathy of the swing voter (but not to the extent of wanting another four years of him).

Finally, in the next debate(s), Trump must not only use characteristic broad adjectives for Biden and Harris, such as

“disaster,” “terrible,” or “horrible,” but simply pepper Harris with what Biden actually did and her role in it. Don’t describe Harris as a disaster, but communicate in exactly what way and precisely how in her own words. And there are 30 years of her extreme advocacies to make that case.

Do all that, and Trump will win decisively in the fashion that Republicans did in 1972, 1980, and 1988 by avoiding the personal and simply demonstrating why McGovern, Carter, and Dukakis were not what they professed to be but entirely at odds with the majority of Americans.

The left wants Trump to spend the next three months harping on Biden’s dementia, the farce of its coverup, the Democrat coup to remove him, and the off-putting record of Kamala Harris.

Yet if Trump falls for all that, he will allow the hardest-left candidate in American history to do to the United States what she and her fellow leftists did to California.

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