**Monday, Nov. 4, 2024 / How Gaza could decide the election**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

SCORING IN—Neutral Susan

NOEL: It’s Today, Explained. More than 78 million Americans have already voted in the 2024 election.

NOEL: Polling still shows a very, very close race. This weekend, a shocking li’l poll from the Des Moines Register showed Kamala Harris three points ahead of Donald Trump in Iowa.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/watch/-shock-result-maddow-on-bombshell-iowa-poll-with-harris-leading-trump-223450181755)*> Rachel Maddow: The prototypical example of a gold-standard poll is the Iowa poll done by J. Anne Selzer in Iowa. // Her polls are known for their uncanny predictive accuracy.*

NOEL: Iowa last broke for the Democrat - Barack Obama - in 2012. It was expected to go to Trump this year. What does this new poll mean? We don’t know. The real polling was the friends we made along the way.

NOEL: We do know that 7 states will decide this election. One of them is Michigan. More than 200-thousand Arab-Americans live there. Many of them say they’re voting on GAZA. If they do … the state that Joe Biden won in 2020 may go, as it did in 2016, for Donald Trump. Michigan: comin’ up!

**[THEME]**

KHALIL: I chose journalism after kind of recognizing that there weren't enough Arab Americans represented in the media, which was a tough thing for my parents.

NOEL: What did they want?

KHALIL: You know, the whole immigrant parent thing, you know, they want you to be a doctor or an engineer, maybe lawyer. But, you know, doctors, number one. And in the Arab community, they all want you to be a doctor. So…

NOEL: Khalil al-Hajel <al-HAH-JELL> is Deputy Opinion Editor at the Detroit Free Press. He is a native of Dearborn Michigan, which, last year, became the first Arab-majority city in the United States.

KHALIL: This particular voting bloc could make the difference. There's all sorts of of issues folks care about. But but definitely the number one issue is, is Gaza, the war in Gaza and now Lebanon.

[*<CLIP> AL JAZEERA ENGLISH:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgTgL5OSEYg) *Now Israeli forces have launched attacks across several parts of Lebanon on Sunday. An airstrike hit a residential area in the coastal area of Sidon, trapping civilians under rubble…”*

KHALIL: We have a lot of Lebanese Americans in particular here. Here in Michigan, Palestinian folks, too. But with the expansion of the war to Lebanon, the, you know, the level of pain and concern and agony over who to vote for is just really grown exponentially in recent weeks. It's it's it's been very difficult year for for Arab Americans here. And as we get closer to the election, you can just kind of feel the tension and the and the difficulty deciding who to vote for, really.

NOEL: All right. So if we look at the polling in the state of Michigan, like many other swing states in the U.S., it is very, very, very tight. There is a significant Arab-American community there. How important is this voting bloc when it comes to winning the state?

KHALIL: It seems to be pivotal for for the Harris campaign, I think. I'm not sure they see it that way. But I would imagine we're talking about a hundred thousand votes here in Michigan. In the last couple of presidential elections, it was it was decided by a matter of 150,000 votes. And I think as close as 10,000.

NOEL: What do the polling numbers show on Trump versus Harris?

KHALIL: Nationwide, it's a split. There was a poll from the Arab American Institute of Air Americans around the country that showed a almost a 50-50 split nationwide. And that was a difference from previous polls that show it about 60-40 in favor of Democrats There certainly are Arab Americans who will vote for Donald Trump, and there are those who who will come around on on Kamala Harris. But there are a lot of folks who feel that their only choices are either Jill Stein or Cornel West, who visited Michigan a lot and who have made real overtures to Arab American communities or do not vote at all. I had to convince my parents to vote in this election, and they did. But it required some arm twisting. They felt very sort of disenfranchised.

NOEL: And we're going to get to Jill Stein and Cornel West in a bit. But let's talk about the two big campaigns and the attempts, if any, that they're making. What is the Harris campaign doing to try to get the Arab-American and Muslim vote?

SCORING IN—INFINITE WHACK A MOLE

KHALIL: Earlier in the campaign, there was there were did seem to be some efforts to to win folks over. There was a large Arab-American Michigan contingent at the DNC.

[*<CLIP> Abbas Alawieh on THIS AMERICAN LIFE:*](https://www.thisamericanlife.org/843/transcript) *We're actually not asking her to adopt the full policy that, like every single one of my cousins, would want her to adopt, which is a full arms embargo. But we need her to move in our direction.*

KHALIL: And there were a lot of negotiations about getting a Palestinian speaker on the stage that night. It didn't end up happening, which was a real disappointment.

[*<CLIP> Abbas Alawieh on THIS AMERICAN LIFE:*](https://www.thisamericanlife.org/843/transcript) *Tell the vice president that I'm. I'm sitting outside. I'm not going anywhere. I hope she changes her mind. Thank you. Okay. I'm going to be sitting down right here….*

KHALIL: I think that was a really pivotal moment. And for a lot of folks who who really felt insulted by that. There certainly have been times where Harris has has answered questions on Gaza in ways that did distinguish her from President Biden in her DNC speech. You know, she said…

*<CLIP> KAMALA HARRIS: and the Palestinian people can realize their right to dignity, security, freedom… [CROWD ROARS]*

KHALIL: That that sounded different from from what we had been hearing for years in presidential politics. It felt like a breakthrough. At the same time, that's a pretty low bar. I mean, it's really just a recognition that Palestinians are human beings who deserve equal rights. And I think that was appreciated. But I'm not sure it was enough to to convince folks that he approach toward this very bloody war in Gaza would change in any way. You know, and that coupled with the, you know, not getting a Palestinian speaker on the stage, I think I think that left a lot of folks dejected.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: Many progressives have questioned Kamala Harris's decision to campaign side by side with Liz Cheney.

[*<CLIP> LIZ CHENEY IN MICHIGAN:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVgFrlwsUoI) *It doesn't matter what party you're in. We all know this is a good and an honorable and a great nation, and we have to have leaders. You might say, I'm not going to agree on every issue, but we have to have leaders who take that seriously.*

NOEL: How is that going over in Arab-American communities there?

KHALIL: Yeah. Not well, Well, yeah. I mean, as soon as the name Dick Cheney came up as somebody who was being courted by the Harris campaign, that that was it was pretty painful. You know, folks associate that guy with the invasion of Iraq and, you know, all sorts of vile things from that period of time in the Bush era. It just seems like the Harris campaign is pursuing maybe more lower hanging fruit, folks who could maybe be more easily convinced. And it feels like like the Arab American voting bloc seems to be maybe more of a liability for the Harris campaign, whereas the Trump campaign is, you know, parading any Arab Americans that can get onto the stages.

[*<CLIP> DONALD TRUMP:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xFcHpeDC4Q&list=RDNS0xFcHpeDC4Q&start_radio=1) *And I'm going to ask all of if I could all of my friends that come up from the Arab and Muslim part of Michigan. And I'd like to give them a big hand because they're going to vote for us and help us win.*

NOEL: Yeah. How's that working? I mean, because. Because for the Trump campaign, there is clearly a real opportunity here. What is Donald Trump doing? How is his campaign showing up in Michigan?

KHALIL: They're showing up a lot. Both campaigns are showing up in Michigan. But when it comes to the Arab community and the Muslim community, Trump seems to be courting them. He's had a number of religious leaders and a couple of local mayors, Arab-American mayors who have showed up on stage and expressed support for him.

[*<CLIP> MI MUSLIM LEADER:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xFcHpeDC4Q&list=RDNS0xFcHpeDC4Q&start_radio=1) *As the president said, we just had a positive meeting with President Trump. We as Muslims stand with President Trump. Because he promises peace. He promises peace, not war.*

KHALIL: For whatever reason, he's got a hold of some folks in this community. I don't think it's a huge segment of the community. But he has won over some some prominent leaders and is bringing them on stage as often as he can, which is a distinction from the Harris campaign, which appears to be more interested in winning over people who maybe were Republicans in the past and are dissatisfied now. It may be a good strategy, I don't know. But. It hurts.

NOEL: All right. So if it's not Trump If it's not Harris, then for people who still want to vote, it's going to be someone. You mentioned, Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate. One poll of American Muslims from this month has her at 42% to Kamala Harris’ 41%. Our producer, Miles Bryan, spoke to her about her pitch and here's what she told him.

*<CLIP> JILL STEIN: Muslim-Americans in particular are very resonant with our message. And basically, we are the only anti genocide anti-war choice that's on the ballot. Specifically, you know, we are looking at the genocide and the fact that Americans do not want this genocide.*

NOEL: Talk to me about why you think Jill Stein's message is resonating.

KHALIL: She's been visiting Michigan repeatedly.

SCORING IN—TIMES ARROW

Attending Arab American functions.

[*<CLIP> SPEAKER AT GAZA RELIEF RALLY, DEARBORN:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBNCY9OEshg&t=1203s) *She is someone who has been a voice of truth. In a sea of lies than our political system. And so here in Dearborn and the heart and the heartbeat of the Arab American community, we welcome this evening for us presidential candidate Dr. Jill Stein.*

KHALIL: Telling them exactly what they want to hear when it comes to war. And, you know, and I think she even describes as what's been happening in Gaza as genocide.

[*<CLIP> JILL STEIN:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBNCY9OEshg&t=1203s) *The American people are in a very active state of uprising right now against this permanent war economy and this genocide.*

KHALIL: She shows up at these rallies wearing a keffiyeh, you know, a traditional Palestinian scarf around her shoulders. She's really embraced there, the Arab community. And literally, you know, you see her hugging folks out in these at these rallies. I think the same is true of of Cornel West.

[*<CLIP> CORNELL WEST:*](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ErmaUmsOhwI) *And so Kamala Harris and the others would have to acknowledge their particular policy, makes them war criminals.*

KHALIL: For some folks, that's the tough decision, whether it's Jill Stein or Cornel West.

NOEL: Hm.

KHALIL: But then, you know, there's there's the simple reality that neither of those two will win. And so for a lot of folks, it remains an agonizing decision.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: Is there any conversation in the Arab-American community, in the Arab-American community, that you're aware of…. If our votes go to Trump and Trump wins, the the people who've historically sided with us, Democrats, progressives are going to blame us.

KHALIL: Yeah, I think so. I think about that a lot. You know, I've been thinking a lot about how to sort of stay that off and sort of prevent blame. And I don't think I don't think Arab Americans will deserve the blame for that if that happens. But honestly, I'm not sure that many Arab Americans are terribly concerned about it because they don't have a political home right now.

SCORING IN—ALRIGHT HERE’S THE PROBLEM

You know, So whatever backlash comes, it's not going to be worse than the pain of the last year of watching your friends and in many cases, your family members. Killed over and over again and seeing the war expand, even as our leaders tell us they're working around the clock for a cease fire. The level of pain of the last year has been, well, it's been worse than any any of the Trump years, believe it or not. It's been excruciating at a level that I'm not sure anyone's really thinking about our future political position. They don't have a political home now. They may not in the future. You know, unless there's some sort of resolution to this conflict and some hope for peace.

SCORING BUMP

NOEL: Khalil AlHajal of the Detroit free press. Coming up: what close polls tell us about MI.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: Alright, Matt Grossman you are the Director of Michigan State’s Institute for Public Policy and Social Research AND a political science professor. We never like to ask people to predict too much, but we are one day out from the election and we have heard that the polls are 50-50, 50-50, 50-50 or like 46-47. What is a likely scenario you can envision here when you look at polling like this?

SCORING IN—WORMHOLE CHAMBER

MATT: Because the seven swing states are so close. One of the most likely scenarios is actually that we've been wrong all along. The polls are off in some systematic fashion across the states, and that means that either Harris or Trump wins all seven or close to all seven of the swing states. I think that's probably actually a pretty likely scenario since we're usually off on average where talking about polls that reach 1 to 2 out of 100 people. So if you think about going around the room talking to random people and seeing the first one out of 100 that's willing to talk to you about politics for 30 minutes, they're probably not going to be very representative. So it's kind of amazing that we get as close as we as we get.

But if you told me it's the morning after the election and Michigan has made the difference. I would say the most likely scenario there is that Democratic weakness among Arab American voters and black voters showed up. And that made a difference in Michigan more than in other places.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: And the candidates are in the state right up until the end. What is Kamala Harris's closing argument?

MATT: Well, there is a bit of dissent, I guess, within the Harris campaign and the broader Democratic apparatus, the Democratic super PAC, which has tested, you know, hundreds of messages, has repeatedly come back and said that actually the most effective messages at the end are about Harris herself and about Harris's economic policy proposals.

[*<CLIP> FUTURE FORWARD HARRIS AD*](https://host2.adimpact.com/admo/viewer/fde55342-ed7f-439b-8fb3-0f9ed45295ec/)*: Kamala Harris will cut taxes for working people and she'll lower everyday costs by taking on price gouging. Trump fights for billionaires like him. Kamala fights for us.*

MATT: But the campaign has remained somewhat focused, while including that message on threats to democracy and the threat of Donald Trump.

[*<CLIP> KAMALA HARRIS IN ANN ARBOR:*](https://host2.adimpact.com/admo/viewer/fde55342-ed7f-439b-8fb3-0f9ed45295ec/) *And let's be clear. We are all here because we are fighting for a democracy. And for the right of people to be heard and seen. We're not about the enemy within….*

MATT: So it'll be interesting to see which one they emphasize more at the end. This is the most money that has been spent in the presidential race. So they really do have the money to to spend it all. But the message is a little bit different in the ads than it is from the candidate herself.

NOEL: In the first half of the show, we talked to Khaleel Alhaji. He's an opinion editor at the Free Press, and he told us that the Arab-American community in and around Detroit is very angry at the Democratic Party. How much do you think this will hurt Kamala Harris?

MATT: It is a small part of the voting population as a whole, but it is one that could swing in a strong direction this year. I think one thing that's misunderstood is that we talked to say the the leaders of the uncommitted vote movement in the presidential primary, and we have this perception that Arab-American voters are kind of liberals overall back concerned about this one issue and willing to sit it out or vote for a third party candidate. But that's really not representative of the Arab-American population as a whole. They have actually been more of a swing vote than people might think. For example, in the 2022 midterm election, the Dearborn area actually moved toward the Republicans while the rest of the state was moving toward the Democrats. But it had it was pre Gaza. It had to do with controversy over LGBT books in schools and over kind of general post-pandemic school policy.

[*<CLIP> FOX2 DETROIT:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpfGXc944v8) *Tense moments and heated exchanges at Dearborn school board meeting Thursday night as parents, residents and community stakeholders sounded off on LGBTQ books in the district's library system.*

MATT: So it's a constituency that has a lot of people who are socially conservative. It also has a lot of small business owners and people who are economically conservative. And yet, since 9/11, have viewed the Democratic Party as their home, as the party that supports them and the Republican Party as the party that opposes them. So it'll be interesting to see if not only do you get a lower support for the Democrat this time, but actually increase Trump support, even though it might seem odd given that Trump's position on Israel is at least as pro Netanyahu, if not more than the Biden administration and Harris.

NOEL: The other demographic that you mentioned that Kamala Harris has had some trouble with is Black voters. We've covered this all year long. Black men in particular are interested in Donald Trump in greater numbers than before. What specifically is Kamala Harris failing to do with this demographic? Or maybe a better way of putting it is that if in the days after the election we learn that black men did turn toward Donald Trump. Is that a is that something that the Trump campaign did right or that the Harris campaign did wrong?

MATT: Maybe neither. These are long term trends in progress. The the age gradient on the white vote is that, you know, the older you are, the more likely you are to be conservative and a Republican voter. But it's actually reversed among black voters. The younger you are, the more likely you are to be a Republican, because it's sort of the progression of losing the cemented tie that the Democrats had to black voters from the civil rights movement and the role of the Republican Party and opposing some of the gains that African-Americans have seen within the Democratic Party. So in some ways, it is kind of part of an ideological realignment or an educational realignment that may be happening kind of regardless of the candidates.

[*<CLIP> MSNBC:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQdGRnTHf5o) *Four years ago, Donald Trump only got about 8% of the black vote. The polls show that he is making inroads among black male voters. The former president, speaking at a black church in Detroit, continued his attacks on immigrants, insisting that the black community is being hurt by those who are entering the country illegally.*

NOEL: All right. Let's talk about Donald Trump. What is his closing argument to the great state of Michigan?

MATT: Well, again, you have a little bit of a differentiation between what the campaign is running on the airwaves, which I take to be the poll tested research supported message, which is clearly just compare the Biden administration to the Trump administration.

[*<CLIP> TRUMP AD:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aqDUgv7GOc)  *Their Bidenomics led to the highest inflation in 40 years, highest gas prices ever. Skyrocketing interest rates. Unaffordable housing.Yet. Kamala Harris is clueless. HARRIS: We are very proud of Bidenomics….*

MATT: And in Michigan, you know, there's a particular gain to talking about nostalgic politics, talking about the way things used to be, because we're a state that used to be, you know, in the top 15 or 20 in income in the U.S. and are now in the bottom 10 or 15 in income in the U.S. So it's a place that really did think that things were better before, at least in economic terms. And so the Trump's message, which is the same nationally, but has a chance to land with Michigan. Now, one, you know, again, it's hard to get the candidate on the same message, especially with Trump.

[*<CLIP> WHAS NEWS:*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2enwNqF3og) *Trump using violent rhetoric, as he called Cheney. A war hawk. TRUMP: Let's put her with a rifle standing there with nine barrel shooting at her. Okay, Let's see how she feels about it.*

MATT: What he's going to talk about in his last few speeches. We don't know. He's ending in Grand Rapids, as he did in the previous two campaigns. So clearly some symbolic importance to Michigan as well.

NOEL: All right. So Michigan is a toss up. Much of the country, the polls tell us, is a tossup. What is the uncertainty in Michigan? Tell us about what the entire country is weighing this year.

MATT: Well, first, it's sort of hard to say whether it's uncertain because of there's a whole bunch of people who haven't made up their mind or if it's just uncertain because we're not great at polling. I do I do want to hold out that second possibility. We could have the election and it could be, you know, six points more to the Harris side or six points more to the Trump side, which would look in our times like a landslide. And, you know, that would just be an average polling error. And it probably is not the case that a whole bunch of people just if that happens, that a whole bunch of people just made up their mind at the end. It is instead that we were just wrong all along.

SCORING IN—RAINBOWBATIZED

But I do think it's important to say it will have been 40 years since a presidential candidate won by ten points or more

NOEL: Huh.

MATT: in 1984. So we just have not had landslide elections. We have been fighting at the middle for a shrinking number of voters who haven't made up their mind between the two sides. And so not not any easy way out of this two sided system.

SCORING BUMP

NOEL: Matt Grossman, Michigan State. Miles Bryan produced today’s episode and Matthew Collette edited. Laura Bullard fact-checked and Rob Byers and Andrea Kristinsdottir engineered. I’m Noel King. It’s Today, Explained.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**