Vice President Kamala Harris attends a political event on July 17, 2024, in Kalamazoo, Mich. [Chris duMond/Getty Images](https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/vice-president-kamala-harris-attends-a-moderated-news-photo/2162037915?adppopup=true)

**GOP attacks against Kamala Harris were already bad – they are about to get worse**

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Public [opinion polls](https://www.foxnews.com/politics/how-does-kamala-harris-poll-against-donald-trump) suggest that U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris is doing slightly better than Joe Biden was against Donald Trump, but [Republican attacks](https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/21/politics/trump-team-kamala-harris-attacks/index.html) against her are only now ramping up.

Even as a candidate for vice president, Harris was the target of an intense barrage of conservative attacks that claimed, among other things, that she [slept her way to political prominence](https://www.thedailybeast.com/maga-world-pivots-to-debunked-kamala-harris-affair-story), a common slur against women in power. The anti-Harris rhetoric is part of what a report by the Wilson Center, a nonpartisan think tank, described as a broad pattern of [gendered and sexualized attacks](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online) on prominent women in public discourse.

More recently, those comments were joined by conservative attacks branding Harris as the “border czar,” part of an effort to tie her to immigration, a [hot-button topic](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/17/us/politics/kamala-harris-border-czar.html?searchResultPosition=2) for conservatives.

The [intense attacks](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/07/21/trump-campaign-kamala-harris-nominee-00170110) so far are only a fraction of what will come. Trump is skilled at both character assassination and political self-defense. Together, they translate into an exceptional ability to defeat his political rivals once they enter the presidential campaign arena.

But Harris also has sharp rhetorical skills that could make this a fierce election fight.

**Trump’s alternative facts**

As I discuss in my book “[Presidential Communication and Character](https://doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2019.1603925),” Trump is highly skilled at both channeling [white working-class anger](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/09/donald-trump-ohio-youngstown-voters) into political support for himself and at convincing his supporters to disregard the former president’s own well-chronicled [professional and personal failings](https://theconversation.com/trump-found-guilty-in-hush-money-trial-but-will-it-hurt-him-in-the-polls-heres-why-voters-often-overlook-the-ethical-failings-of-politicians-230529).

Trump’s character generates enduring contempt among liberals, but those voters will back the Democratic nominee.



Donald Trump greets supporters at a campaign rally in Manchester, N.H., in April 2023. [Spencer Platt/Getty Images](https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/former-president-donald-trump-greets-supporters-at-a-news-photo/1485874519?adppopup=true)

In 2016, [Trump defeated](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/12-days-stunned-nation-how-hillary-clinton-lost-n794131) Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. He also defeated several well-known Republican presidential hopefuls in the primary race, including Sens. [Marco Rubio](https://www.newsweek.com/marco-rubios-own-words-about-donald-trump-used-against-him-1882857) of Florida and [Ted Cruz](https://www.texastribune.org/2024/07/16/ted-cruz-trump-republican-national-convention/) of Texas and former Governors [Jeb Bush](https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/01/trump-bush-rivalry-1037143) of Florida, [John Kasich](https://www.politico.com/story/2018/02/02/trump-rnc-dinner-2018-kasich-384975) of Ohio and [Scott Walker](https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/29/politics/donald-trump-scott-walker-wisconsin/index.html) of Wisconsin.

Earlier in 2024, Trump easily dispatched another round of highly experienced Republicans, most notably Florida Gov. [Ron DeSantis](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/trump-desantis-rivalry-beyond-2024-2028-rcna128820) and former South Carolina Gov. [Nikki Haley](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/27/us/politics/trump-michigan-haley.html).

Like those other opponents, President Biden has long endured Trump’s personal attacks. But in 2020, Trump’s original nickname of “Sleepy Joe” failed to become as effective as his insults aimed at other politicians, and Biden’s election marked Trump’s only electoral defeat.

As the 2024 election approached, Trump and conservative voices once again demonstrated their immense influence in shaping political narratives. They have convinced many voters this year to absolve Trump for his [mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/politics/trump-covid-pandemic-dark-winter/), ignore that he [designed a Supreme Court majority](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-built-supreme-court-conservative-majority-loses-rcna131956) to overturn [Roe v. Wade](https://www.npr.org/2022/06/24/1102305878/supreme-court-abortion-roe-v-wade-decision-overturn) and agree with him that the [2020 election](https://www.reuters.com/graphics/USA-TRUMP/LAWMAKERS/xegpbedzdvq/) was stolen.

In an even more powerful demonstration of Trump’s skills at political marketing, polls show that many voters follow Trump’s lead and [condemn Biden](https://www.barrons.com/news/trump-says-inflation-is-killing-our-country-under-biden-d6606d96) for U.S. economic conditions that in fact are quite good.

[Unemployment is low](https://www.cnn.com/business/live-news/markets-jobs-report-september/index.html). Job growth is [booming](https://www.cnn.com/business/live-news/markets-jobs-report-september/index.html). [Infrastructure projects](https://www.axios.com/2024/01/25/biden-infrastructure-projects) are underway. Inflation is [much lower](https://www.npr.org/2024/04/25/1247177492/why-experts-say-inflation-is-relatively-low-but-voters-feel-differently) now than it was earlier in Biden’s term, and [individual retirement accounts](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2023/10/31/new-fiduciary-rule-retirement/71399693007/) are flush thanks to large stock market gains.

Given Trump’s public relations mastery – and the great susceptibility of many voters to his false narratives – one can marvel about how the Biden campaign had been able to endure the never-ending rhetorical assault and keep the contest [as close as surveys](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/07/14/biden-trump-post-debate-polls-nbc-news-cbs-fox-00168085) show it had remained until recently.

During a rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on July 20, 2024, Trump [attacked both Biden and Harris](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/07/21/trump-campaign-kamala-harris-nominee-00170110), repeatedly calling Biden “stupid” and insulting his IQ. But Harris, Trump said, was “crazy.”

“I call her laughing Kamala,” Trump told the crowd. “You can tell a lot by a laugh. She’s crazy. She’s nuts.”

**A former prosecutor against a convicted felon**

With Biden dropping out of the campaign, political developments suggest Trump may be in for a taste of his own medicine.

Harris’ [previous career](https://www.npr.org/2020/08/12/901859774/a-look-at-kamala-harris-career-as-a-u-s-senator) as a U.S. senator who challenged Trump administration officials and the former president’s judicial nominees demonstrates that she is among the most effective Democratic officeholders when it comes to holding Republicans accountable.

Her career as an [attorney general and a prosecutor](https://www.cbsnews.com/sacramento/news/what-to-know-about-kamala-harris-record-as-california-attorney-general/) also allows her to use law-and-order themes to [fight back](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/07/22/harris-trump-prosecutor-felon/) against [America’s first convicted felon former president](https://theconversation.com/trumps-guilty-verdict-is-not-the-end-of-the-matter-231044).

[Biden’s departure](https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/21/politics/inside-bidens-exit-from-2024-race/index.html) may provide another major opportunity for Harris to reset the character assassination narrative, as the focus on age can now boomerang against Republicans. Trump now holds the record as the oldest major-party nominee for president, and a key issue that [he used against Biden](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/campaigns/presidential/3093648/republicans-biden-age-democrats-target-trump/) is likely to be turned back toward the former president.

For voters, it promises to be a scorched-earth campaign season.