



# Voters still aren't sure what 'wishy washy' Kamala really stands for

**E**VENTS in far-off lands seldom sway American votes. The same is true in this year's presidential election – except that those taking a particular interest in one overseas conflict could have a disproportionate effect on the outcome.

Michigan – which backed Donald Trump in 2016 and Joe Biden four years later but is now too close to call according to current polls – is home to a large Muslim population for whom the Middle East conflict is a source of daily concern.

That is a worry for the Democrats. Though Biden won Muslim areas comfortably in 2020, they turned against him in this year's Democratic primaries, largely over what they saw as his excessive support for Israel.

Listening to young Muslim voters around Detroit this week as part of our tour of the swing states, it was clear that many feel the same way about his successor as the party's nominee.

'Harris is supporting genocide,' one told us. 'There's not one interview where she's standing up for Palestinians or Muslims or Arab Americans. We have family in Palestine, in Lebanon and those areas, so it's important to us.'

Some detected a deeper shift. 'At least Trump is going to Muslim mayors in Michigan and shaking their hand,' another observed. 'Kamala won't touch them. Twenty years ago, this would not be going on with the Republican and Democratic parties.'

**S**OME felt little now separated the parties on the issue. 'They're both very pro-Israel,' a young man lamented. 'So I'm voting on the other stuff, such as reproductive rights, student loans, lowering prices. What we can accomplish here.'

But others were prepared to act, perhaps backing the Green candidate instead: 'Jill Stein got arrested for protesting for Palestine as a Jewish woman. That alone makes me want to support her,' one declared. If that meant Trump taking the state and therefore the nation, so be it.

This is not the Democrats' only headache. Many feel Harris has grown in confidence and they give her credit for taking on tougher interviews, including one with Fox News, even if her performances have received mixed reviews.



**COMMENTARY**  
**By Lord Ashcroft**

But others feel they still do not know her well enough, and there are doubts about her authenticity.

'She speaks completely different depending on what demographic she's with,' a Philadelphia woman observed. Several had noticed that she had changed her position on some issues, including one of major interest in hotly contested Pennsylvania.

'She was against fracking and now she's for fracking, so it's hard to tell,' one man reflected. 'She's very evasive on her stances and why she would have changed.' Another woman said: 'I feel like she's a little sneaky, like she's always smiling at me and trying to confuse me.'

As I noted earlier in the campaign, Harris's lack of definition allows voters to project their hopes onto her, which helps harness supporters even if it means she will have to disappoint some of them in office if she wins.

Some don't need to know the details: 'I feel like she has good intentions, even if I don't know what her policies are going to be,' another woman in Michigan told us.

But we often hear the complaint (which will no doubt become a major theme if she loses) that Harris was installed as the nominee without the usual democratic process.

While many say this matters less than stopping Trump, it highlights another worry we often hear about a Harris presidency: that it would be a cabal of shady Democratic operatives – or whoever it was who handed her the nomination without the voters' consent – who really call the shots.

'She has this puppeteer vibe,' one concerned voter told us. 'She's scripted. I think they're feeding her what to say and I don't feel she's genuine.' If she wins, 'she's not really going to run things. Someone else is going to run it for her. I want her to lead as a leader and not feel like she has someone's hand on her shoulder.'

Or as another had it: 'All Kamala Harris would be is a pretty puppet to stand in front of the microphone and say "We're going to do this or this". But it's going to be a decision made among the group behind the Wizard of Oz curtain.'

As with almost everything else in

contemporary American life, this is something that the opposing sides see differently.

To her supporters, the presidency is about more than one person: 'There's a loose cannon on the one hand, and then there's somebody who's at least willing to listen,' as one put it. 'She's more stable and she'll listen to experts, where Trump thinks he's the expert in the world.'

Those leaning towards the Republican candidate, meanwhile, are more likely to favour what has been described as the 'great man' theory of history – that it is individual figures, rather than impersonal forces, that really shape events.

**O**N THIS reading, the former president's character – even his vanity – are of service to the American people. 'Trump's ego is so big that whatever he says he's going to, he's going to do it,' one man said. 'He wants to be known as something, so he actually wants to make a complete change.'

They point to a thriving pre-2020 economy and the guarded respect for the US among world leaders during the Trump years.

Some uncommitted voters also say his iconoclastic persona is an attraction. There would be no doubt who made the decisions, and it would not be Washington's lifetime bureaucrats. 'Trump actually ran the show when he was president,' said one waverer, 'whereas with Biden and Kamala there's more people in charge of what's going on. I feel they just get handed stuff and it's "hey, this is what we're doing".'

In fact, both sides believe Trump wields personal force (whether for prosperity and strength or for division and disaster) and that Harris represents more conventional politics (whether for steadiness and calm or the old guard and establishment interests).

For the few undecideds left, the contrast presents another dilemma. As one put it: 'You're going from one extreme, which is Trump's way or the highway, to her, where she's kind of wishy-washy. I'm not sure which direction she'll take.'

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Kamala Harris is neck and neck with Donald Trump