

Challenges for the Second-in-Command: Kamala Harris as a Presidential Candidate

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Vice President Kamala Harris is an unlikely presidential candidate in 2024, but she could mount a second run for the presidency in a future election cycle. When Harris launched her presidential campaign in 2019, she brought her experience as an Attorney General and US Senator from California to the race. She also generated excitement as a female, African American and Asian American candidate who could speak to multiple constituencies. This essay examines three rhetorical challenges Harris could face during a future presidential campaign: the rhetorical framing of her experience as vice president, the rhetorical framing of her gender, and the rhetorical framing of her experience as a bi-racial African American and Asian American politician. The rhetorical choices she makes and the media coverage she receives will affect her political opportunities as well as the opportunities of those who follow her.

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Kamala Harris is an unlikely candidate for President in 2024. There are only two scenarios in which she would be running for president during that election cycle. The first scenario is if she challenged incumbent President Joe Biden. This would be a stinging rebuke to Biden. It would also create a dramatic rift within the Democratic Party, which Democrats would be eager to avoid when trying to reelect an incumbent. In the second scenario, if Joe Biden died or resigned from office during his first term, Harris would succeed the president and face the choice to run for reelection in 2024. Although this possibility is remote, it is worth noting that Biden is the oldest president we have ever had in office; he was 78 years and 61 days old upon taking office on January 20, 2021.

In April 2023, I put the odds of a Harris 2024 presidential run at less than 5%. Today, in October 2023, I believe the odds are the same. At 80 years old, Biden has enjoyed the accomplishments and endured the stresses of the presidency during his first term.¹ He announced on April 25, 2023, that he will run for reelection. His age continues to be a factor in his performance of his presidential duties and it will certainly be an issue in his reelection campaign. But Biden, Harris,

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¹ Jason Hanna, "Do Presidents Age Faster in Office?," *CNN*, August 4, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/08/04/presidents.aging/index.html>.

and the Democratic Party are determined not to legitimize questions about Biden's age.² Biden is more than 20 years older than Harris; while Harris will probably have other opportunities to run for office, 2024 will presumably be Biden's last campaign. Consequently, Biden is on track to run for reelection in 2024, which effectively precludes Harris from running for president during the same election cycle.

Although a 2024 presidential campaign by Kamala Harris is unlikely, it is still wise to examine her as a presidential prospect. We know that Harris has presidential aspirations; she was one of the Democrats who ran during the 2020 Democratic primary. Moreover, she was born on October 20, 1964, which will make her 60 years old on Election Day 2024. She has time to run for president again in a future race. For those reasons, it is worthwhile to consider the rhetorical challenges she would face and the rhetorical strategies she might use as a presidential candidate.

Were she to run for president, Harris would face at least three rhetorical challenges. The first is the usual challenge of a vice president running for the presidency. She would need to separate herself from the administration in which she served, but not look as if she is rejecting it. Simultaneously, she would be wise to associate herself with the successes of that administration, while carving out her own identity. The second rhetorical challenge Harris would face is her gender. She is the first woman to serve as vice president, which is the highest national office to which a woman has been elected in the U.S. While both Democratic and Republican women running for president has become increasingly mainstream, there is still a significant gender gap between women and men seeking political office.³ This gender gap translates into women being "dramatically underrepresented" in elected office.⁴ In addition, gender expectations regarding female and male leaders still present challenges to women running for or serving in political office. Harris's third rhetorical challenge is her racial identity. She is the first person of color to serve as vice president, and identifies as both Black and Asian. She would need to convey those experiences in a campaign narrative that would appeal to the largest possible number of voters. Faced with a rapidly changing electorate, this rhetorical challenge may also present a rhetorical opportunity. To this end, Harris would continue to make strategic discursive choices in communicating her accomplishments, goals, and perspectives to as wide and diverse an audience as she could reach. Harris's campaign narratives, like all campaign narratives, are co-created by the media. With this in mind, I look briefly at the framing of Harris's political record, her gender, and her racial identity. This analysis suggests some rhetorical possibilities for a Harris presidential campaign.

Framing Harris's Political Record

I start with her campaign during the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, when she garnered a national profile. Kamala Harris's presidential campaign in 2020 left her open to two charges which foreshadowed some of the pressures she has faced during her vice presidency. Some critics accused

² Perry Bacon, Jr., "There's a Simple Answer to Questions About Biden's Age. Why Won't Democrats Say It?," *The Washington Post*, September 19, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/09/19/biden-age-concerns-kamala-harris/>.

³ Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, "Running for Office is Still for Men—Some Data on the 'Ambition Gap,'" *Brookings*, February 8, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2022/02/08/running-for-office-is-still-for-men-some-data-on-the-ambition-gap/#:~:text=Among%20this%20new%20crop%20of%20of.60%25%20of%20women%20have%20not.>

⁴ Naomi Cahn, "Why Aren't There Even More Women Political Leaders?" *Forbes*, December 6, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/naomicahn/2020/12/06/why-arent-there-even-more-women-political-leaders/?sh=486883533d16>.

her of being too disorganized and inexperienced to mount a successful presidential campaign. At the same time, she was criticized for being too calculating and harsh in her campaign rhetoric. During the 2020 Democratic primary, over two dozen major candidates declared their intention to run for president. Harris joined the race on January 19, 2019; her polling peaked at 15% in June 2019 before dropping down to single digits by the end of 2019.⁵ One of her campaign workers was quoted anonymously in *Politico* describing her campaign style as “No discipline. No plan. No strategy.”⁶ The BBC reported that despite success in her debate performances, Harris offered “poorly articulated policies” and was not able to garner support from both moderate and progressive Democrats.⁷

Even as Harris was judged to be too disorganized to run a credible presidential campaign, critics argued that Harris was scheming and disingenuous in trying to differentiate herself from her opponents. During a primary debate in 2019, she responded to then-candidate Biden’s recollection of working with pro-segregationist Democratic senators by saying, “you worked with them to oppose busing. There was a little girl in California who was part of the second class to integrate her public schools and she was bused to school every day. That little girl was me.”⁸ One commentator said that “tension erupted” in response to Harris’s statement;⁹ another argued that this remark sent “shockwaves” through the audience.¹⁰ Immediately after this debate exchange, Harris’s Twitter account tweeted a photo of Harris at the age of six with the caption: “There was a little girl in California who was bused to school. That little girl was me.”¹¹ This indicated that her attack in the debate had been “carefully planned.”¹² The depictions of Harris as being simultaneously too disorganized and too calculating made it difficult for her to promote a persuasive narrative of how she could be an effective leader.

Harris suspended her Democratic primary campaign on December 3, 2019, two months prior to the 2020 Iowa Caucus. Several factors contributed to her drop in polls and her subsequent decision to leave the race. Her profile was not as nationally prominent as other primary candidates, her campaign struggled with fundraising, and “her central struggle appear[ed] to be a lack of consistent connection with voters.”¹³ If Harris embarks on a future presidential run, her national profile will certainly be higher. She will need to demonstrate, however, that she has the fundraising power she needs and that she can connect better with voters. Harris endorsed Joe Biden as the Democratic nominee on March 8, 2020, and Biden announced that he had chosen Harris as his running mate on August 11, 2020.

Once she was sworn in as vice president, Harris took on the duties of the office, as well as the challenges of presenting herself as a capable public servant who could advance a political agenda

⁵ Li Zhou, “Kamala Harris’s Decline in the Polls, Explained,” *Vox*, December 3, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/11/20/20953284/kamala-harris-polls-2020-election>.

⁶ Christopher Cadelago, “‘No Discipline. No Plan. No Strategy.’: Kamala Harris Campaign in Meltdown,” *Politico*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/news/2019/11/15/kamala-harris-campaign-2020-071105>.

⁷ Holly Honderich and Samantha Dissanayake, “Kamala Harris: The Many Identities of the First Woman Vice-President,” *BBC*, November 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2020-53728050>.

⁸ Harris, quoted in Ellie Bufkin, “‘That Little Girl Was Me’: Kamala Harris Says She Was a Victim of Biden’s Anti-Busing Racial Policies,” June 27, 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/kamala-harris-says-she-was-a-victim-of-bidens-racial-policies>.

⁹ Bufkin, “Kamala Harris Says.”

¹⁰ Maureen Johnson, “‘That Little Girl Was Me’: Kamala Harris and the Civil Whites of 1964 and Beyond,” *Cardozo Law Review* 44, no. 2, <https://cardozolawreview.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/6.-JOHNSONforwebsite.pdf>.

¹¹ Bufkin, “Kamala Harris Says.”

¹² Bufkin, “Kamala Harris Says.”

¹³ Zhou, “Kamala Harris’s Decline in Polls.”

while remaining loyal to the president. As vice president, she has been assigned roles and projects consistent with other vice presidents. She has been the tie-breaking vote in an evenly split Senate. She has been the U.S. representative at world conferences and summits, including the Munich Security Conference in February 2022, where she met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November 2022. In April 2023, Harris conducted a tour of Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia. Harris has also responded to hot-button domestic issues. The vice president attended the funeral service of Tyre Nichols, a Black man who died at the hands of five Memphis police officers. “Tyre Nichols should have been safe,” Harris said at the service.¹⁴ Harris visited Nashville in April 2023 to support the Tennessee State Representatives known as the Tennessee Three. Gloria Johnson, Justin Jones, and Justin Pearson were Democratic Tennessee state representatives who protested on behalf of gun reform laws in the Tennessee House. In response, the Tennessee House voted on resolutions to expel them (Jones and Pearson were expelled; Johnson avoided expulsion by a single vote). At an appearance with Jones, Pearson, and Johnson at Fiske University, Harris said that the Tennessee Three and their Democratic colleagues “chose to show courage in the face of extreme tragedy.”¹⁵ In 2021, President Biden appointed Harris to address the root causes of migration from Central American to the United States. Harris has also publicized the administration’s agenda on energy policy, jobs, infrastructure, and reproductive rights.

Harris’s political performance has drawn criticism from some. During her national campaigns and her tenure as vice president, detractors have accused Harris of not being tough enough against police abuses.¹⁶ Critics of Biden’s immigration policy pointed out that, under Harris’s watch, U.S. southern border crossings increased to record levels in 2021 and 2022, and thus argue that Harris has been ineffective on this issue. One political observer in April 2023 argued, “she’s widely considered a disappointment.”¹⁷ Some reporting framed her stance on reproductive rights as a deflection from other failures, depicting it as a “shift in strategy from the White House . . . since the vice president’s fraught first year, during which frustration from aides and allies reached a zenith.”¹⁸ Like all vice presidents before her, Harris has been unable to pull off the impossible task of projecting the “power and powerlessness” that the role of vice president demands.¹⁹

Framing Harris’s Gender

In addition to extolling her performance as vice president persuasively, Kamala Harris has a second challenge if she runs for president again. Harris will not only need to convey her record as an elected official, she will need to contend with voters’ perceptions of her gender. Voter perception

¹⁴ Paul LeBlanc, “Harris Mourns Tyre Nichols at Funeral and Calls for Police Reform: He ‘Should Have Been Safe,’” *CNN*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/01/politics/kamala-harris-tyre-nichols-funeral/index.html>.

¹⁵ Harris, quoted in Becca Andrews, “Kamala Harris Praises Courage of ‘Tennessee Three’ on Visit to Nashville,” *The Guardian*, April 8, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/08/kamala-harris-tennessee-three-nashville-visit-expelled-democrats>.

¹⁶ Honderich and Dissanyake, “The Many Identities.”

¹⁷ Greg Valliere, “How Kamala Harris Could Become the Next President,” *AGF*, April 6, 2023, <https://perspectives.agf.com/how-kamala-harris-could-become-the-next-president/>.

¹⁸ Jasmine Wright, “Kamala Harris Found Her Voice on Abortion Rights in the Year After Dobbs. Now She’s Making it Central to Her 2024 Message,” *CNN*, June 24, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/24/politics/kamala-harris-abortion-rights/index.html>.

¹⁹ Don J. Waisanen and Amy B. Becker, “The Problem with Being Joe Biden: Political Comedy and Circulating Personae,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 32, no. 4 (October 2015): 256-271.

of women candidates varies greatly depending on the sex, age, marital status, and political identification of the voter.²⁰ The media will play a critical role in framing Harris as a female presidential candidate. The press coverage of her record as an elected official in California, as a presidential and vice presidential candidate, and as vice president provides a preview of the questions she could face regarding her gender if she runs for president.

As a presidential candidate, Harris would be one of a handful of women who have thus far run for that office. Scholars of political communication have detailed the double bind that female politicians face. Women who exhibit behaviors that are coded as “feminine” are not considered suited to leadership, while women who are perceived as competent in public life are criticized for being too “masculine.” Women politicians must navigate these contradictory expectations and are judged according to different—and more stringent—criteria than men.²¹

One of the ways Kamala Harris has faced this double bind is in the question of her “electability” as a woman. The degree to which women candidates are discriminated against due to their sex is difficult to pinpoint.²² Nevertheless, a majority of Americans perceive that it is “easier” for men to run successfully for office and a majority of Americans report that one reason for this is that Americans are not “ready” to vote for women seeking high office.²³ A 2019 CNN poll found that 46% of Democratic voters listed electability as a top issue in their choosing a candidate.²⁴ This belief can become a self-fulfilling prophecy: a woman runs for office and loses, thus demonstrating that women cannot get elected, which discourages other women from running. The double bind for women is that they can contribute to the “unelectability” of women whether they run or not. In addition to the question of “electability,” women candidates also encounter questions about “representation.” Women politicians must demonstrate that they can represent the interests of men as well as women. This expectation rests on the assumption that women and men have fundamentally different political interests and it puts women candidates into the double bind of demonstrating that they can take on “masculine” political concerns without violating the standards of femininity. Harris tried to dismantle this way of thinking by saying that “the conversation too often suggests certain voters will only vote for certain candidates regardless of whether their ideas will lift up all our families. It’s shortsighted. It’s wrong. And voters deserve better.”²⁵ This question of representation also has implications for Harris’s racial identity, as I will explore later.

Another way in which Harris has faced a gendered double bind is in her record as a California prosecutor, district attorney, and state attorney general. While it is often a political advantage for

²⁰ Ronald Brownstein, “There Is Still a Huge Divide on Gender Roles in the US,” *CNN*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/09/politics/us-divide-gender-roles-kavanaugh-women-college/index.html>.

²¹ See, for instance, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Diana B. Carlin and Kelly L. Winfrey, “Have You Come a Long Way, Baby?: Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Sexism in 2008 Campaign Coverage,” *Communication Studies* 60, no. 4 (September-October 2009): 326-343; Karrin Vasby Anderson, “Every Woman Is the Wrong Woman: The Female Presidentiality Paradox,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 40, no. 2 (2017): 132-135; Karrin Vasby Anderson, “Presidential Pioneer or Campaign Queen?: Hillary Clinton and the First-Timer/Frontrunner Double Bind,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 20, no. 3 (2017): 525-538.

²² Perry Bacon, Jr., “The Problem with Electability,” *FiveThirtyEight*, August 21, 2018, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-problem-with-electability/>.

²³ Bruce Drake, “Fast Facts on the Challenges Americans See for Female Political Candidates as Warren Exits 2020 Race,” *Pew Research Center*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/03/06/fast-facts-on-the-challenges-americans-see-for-female-political-candidates-as-warren-exits-2020-race/>.

²⁴ Nia-Malika Henderson, “Whites (and Men) Only? Harris Goes There on the ‘Electability’ Argument,” *CNN*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/06/politics/kamala-harris-joe-biden-electability-race/index.html>.

²⁵ Harris quoted in Henderson, “Whites (and Men) Only?”

prosecutors to run on their tough records, this can be difficult for women to do. Women who are perceived as too tough may also be perceived as insufficiently feminine. One reporter observed that Harris's record was "filled with contradictions," which raised questions for some critics about "whether women are 'tough' enough for the job."²⁶ Moreover, Harris's claim of toughness was a disadvantage for her as she sought to persuade the most liberal Democratic voters. Voters' interpretations of these tensions would certainly be a feature of a Harris presidential run. There is evidence to suggest that voters who identify as conservative have more traditional expectations of women's roles, and this can make them less comfortable with female politicians.²⁷ Conversely, more progressive-leaning voters are more likely to embrace changing gender roles and the prospect of women in office.²⁸ Liberal voters would likely not be dissuaded from supporting Harris based on her gender. Harris's challenge would be to embody gender in a way that would secure the support of as many moderates and independents as possible.

Framing Harris's Racial Identity

Harris's third rhetorical challenge as a presidential candidate is communicating her racial identity. In addition to presenting herself as an electable woman, Harris would also need to convey her experience as a bi-racial daughter of immigrants in a way that resonates with the largest number of voters. Her mother, Shyama Gopalan, came to the U.S. from India; her father, Donald J. Harris, came to the U.S. from Jamaica. The challenges faced by Black politicians in the U.S. are not new; in addition, Harris will also need to negotiate issues concerning her Asian identity. African American politicians encounter their own double bind. Barack Obama faced questions on the presidential campaign trail about whether he was "too Black" or "not Black enough."²⁹ Kamala Harris has responded to the criticism that she is not Black enough by pointing to her experiences growing up in Oakland, California; her matriculation at Howard University; and her membership in Alpha Kappa Alpha, the oldest historically Black sorority. According to Harris and many people close to her, Harris's time at Howard University was a formative experience in Harris's identity as a Black American. One reporter described Howard University as a place "where Harris could become the woman that her mother always knew her to be: unquestionably, simply black."³⁰ Despite these experiences, people have contested Harris's identification as Black,³¹ causing a commentator to observe, "To have her Blackness questioned in this way must've been jarring for a woman . . .

²⁶ German Lopez, "Kamala Harris's Controversial Record on Criminal Justice, Explained," *Vox*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2019/1/23/18184192/kamala-harris-president-campaign-criminal-justice-record>.

²⁷ Brownstein, "There Is Still a Huge Divide."

²⁸ Brownstein, "There Is Still a Huge Divide."

²⁹ Barack Obama, "Transcript: Barack Obama's Speech on Race," *NPR*, March 18, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88478467>. See also Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, "Barack Obama's Eulogy for the Reverend Clementa Pinckney, June 26, 2015: Grace as the Vehicle for Collective Salvation and Obama's Agency on Civil Rights," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 23, no. 1 (2020): 107-152; and Antonio Sparks, "Minstrel Politics or 'He Speaks Too Well': Rhetoric, Race, and Resistance in the 2008 Presidential Campaign," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 46 (Summer 2009): 21-38.

³⁰ Robin Givhan, "Kamala Harris Grew Up in a Mostly White World. Then She Went to a Black University in a Black City," *The Washington Post*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/16/kamala-harris-grew-up-mostly-white-world-then-she-went-black-university-black-city/>.

³¹ Nisha Chittal, "The Kamala Harris Identity Debate Shows How America Still Struggles to Talk about Multiracial People," *Vox*, January 20, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/8/14/21366307/kamala-harris-black-south-asian-indian-identity>.

[who] has likely been viewed as Black by a majority white society.”³² Harris will need to respond to the ongoing challenge to her Black identity.

But Harris is not only Black, she is also Asian and must communicate her Asian identity. Some observers have argued that American voters see Harris as Black and overlook her Asian identity, thus contributing to the “invisibility” of Asian Americans in political life.³³ Some have even suggested that Harris herself has downplayed her Asian ancestry.³⁴ Others note that, for multiracial people, “defining their racial identity in America can be a complex and fraught issue,” and that the debate over Harris’s identity “tells us that we still have a long way to go”³⁵ regarding the conversation about multiracial people in the US.

Some of this complexity stems from cultural messages that pit Asian Americans and African Americans against each other. Asian Americans have been subject to a “model minority” myth that posits that Asian Americans share a cultural script in which they venerate traditional Asian values such as hard work and education.³⁶ According to this narrative, Asian Americans are able to parlay those values into professional and economic success in American society. This myth flattens understanding of Asian American experiences and puts pressure on Asian Americans to perform in “model” ways. The myth is also reductive in that, by classifying Asian Americans as a “model” minority, it by definition casts other minority groups as less than exemplary.³⁷ As a result, this narrative has acted as a wedge between Asian American and African American populations.³⁸ This wedge has a potential political cost for Asian and Black Americans because it invites these voter groups to view each other as adversaries rather than allies. Moreover, this myth “allows a segment of white America to avoid any responsibility for addressing racism or the damage it continues to inflict.”³⁹ In this context, Kamala Harris faces a challenge in conveying that she has strong ties to both Asian and Black voters.

This debate is complicated by the fact that many Americans are “confused” about who is considered Asian and Asian American.⁴⁰ This confusion is particularly pronounced regarding people who are South Asians, such as Indians and Indian Americans. In the 2016 National Asian American Survey, 42 percent of White respondents said that Indians were not Asian; 34 percent of Black

³² Nadra Nittle, “Kamala Harris Is Asian and Black. That Shouldn’t Be Confusing in 2020—But It Is to Some,” *NBC*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/kamala-harris-asian-black-shouldn-t-be-confusing-2020-it-ncna1236501>.

³³ Kumari Devarajan, “Claim Us if You’re Famous,” *NPR*, November 10, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/11/10/933631207/claim-us-if-youre-famous>.

³⁴ Kevin Sullivan, “‘I Am Who I Am’: Kamala Harris, Daughter of Indian and Jamaican Immigrants, Defines Herself Simply as ‘American,’” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/i-am-who-i-am-kamala-harris-daughter-of-indian-and-jamaican-immigrants-defines-herself-simply-as-american/2019/02/02/0b278536-24b7-11e9-ad53-824486280311_story.html

³⁵ Chittal, “Kamala Harris Identity Debate.”

³⁶ Yuko Kawai, “Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril,” *Howard Journal of Communications* 16 (2005): 109-130; and Kat Chow, “Model Minority’ Myth Again Used as a Racial Wedge Between Asians and Blacks,” *NPR*, April 19, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/524571669/model-minority-myth-again-used-as-a-racial-wedge-between-asians-and-blacks>.

³⁷ Kawai, “Stereotyping Asian Americans.”

³⁸ Kawai, “Stereotyping Asian Americans.”

³⁹ Chow, “‘Model Minority’ Myth.”

⁴⁰ Carla Herreria Russo, “Basically Nobody Knows Who Counts as an Asian Person,” *HuffPost*, May 18, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/nobody-knows-what-an-asian-person-is_n_591cb4f8e4b03b485cae4d18.

respondents and 35 percent of Latino respondents also said that Indians were not Asian.⁴¹ Surprisingly, even 15 percent of Asian-Americans indicated that Indians were not Asian.⁴²

For her part, Harris has responded to this debate by stressing that she is proud of both her Indian and African ancestry.⁴³ She also invokes a larger perspective when she answers questions about her racial identity with, “I describe myself as a proud American,” and, “I am who I am. I’m good with it.”⁴⁴ Indeed, her status as a mixed-race person whose parents were both immigrants and whose marriage is interracial and inter-faith, reflects growing demographic trends in the U.S.⁴⁵ These changes may constitute an opportunity as well as a challenge for Kamala Harris if she runs for president. Shifting demographics nationally, as well as in battleground states, “could continue to reshape the electoral landscape in future elections.”⁴⁶ While it is crucial to remember that demographics do not predict voting behavior, the U.S. electorate reflects the changes of the general population, and these changes can “provide clues for how political winds may shift over time.”⁴⁷ Voters seek identification with political candidates, and ethnic or racial identity can be one source of that identification, provided that voters judge a candidate’s persona to be authentic.⁴⁸ There is reason to believe that Harris’s identity and experience can broaden her own political path and help those who follow her. As the BBC observed, Harris’s “biracial roots and upbringing mean she embodies and can engage with and appeal to many American identities.”⁴⁹ A growing number of Americans can see “an aspirational symbol” in her.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Although Kamala Harris is an unlikely presidential candidate in 2024, she may choose to run for president again in the future. If Joe Biden serves a full two terms, Kamala Harris may become the standard-bearer for the Democratic Party based on her two terms as vice president. Electoral history has not been especially encouraging to sitting or former vice presidents who run for president, but there are enough exceptions, most recently George H. W. Bush and Joe Biden, to suggest that it can be done. If Kamala Harris runs for president again, she will have to negotiate questions regarding her record as vice president, her political performance as a woman, and her public interpretation of her bi-racial identity. Her rhetorical strategies in framing these issues have undergone scrutiny and have received both support and criticism. Media voices have been instrumental in interpreting and framing these issues. The rhetorical choices Harris makes and the media coverage she receives if she chooses to run again will be important to watch. They will affect not only Kamala Harris’s political opportunities, but the opportunities of others who follow her.

⁴¹ Russo, “Basically Nobody Knows.”

⁴² Russo, “Basically Nobody Knows.”

⁴³ Honderich and Dissanyake, “The Many Identities;” Sullivan, “I Am Who I Am.”

⁴⁴ Harris, quoted in Sullivan, “I Am Who I Am.”

⁴⁵ Kim Parker and Amanda Barroso, “In Vice President Kamala Harris, We Can See How America Has Changed,” *Pew Research Center*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/02/25/in-vice-president-kamala-harris-we-can-see-how-america-has-changed/>.

⁴⁶ “The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the U.S. Electorate,” *Pew Research Center*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/2020/09/23/the-changing-racial-and-ethnic-composition-of-the-u-s-electorate/>.

⁴⁷ “The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition.”

⁴⁸ Ann E. Burnette and Wayne L. Kraemer, “Representing or Hispandering? Beto O’Rourke, Political Identity, and Identification,” in *Local Theories of Argument*, ed. Dale Hampl (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2021): 51-57.

⁴⁹ Honderich and Dissanyake, “The Many Identities.”

⁵⁰ Honderich and Dissanyake, “The Many Identities.”