

To: Interested Parties

From: PSG Consulting, Innovating for the Public Good: R&D for Democracy and TargetSmart Research Solutions

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Subject: Dial Testing and Survey Results From Harris-Trump Debate

Vice President Kamala Harris’ Debate Win, Quantified

In partnership with [Innovating for the Public Good: R&D for Democracy](#) and [PSG Consulting](#), [TargetSmart](#) conducted qualitative research measuring the sentiment of nearly 100 voters around the September 10, 2024, presidential debate. The research used live dials and a pre-debate and post-debate survey with an audience of swing voters and Democratic-leaning mobilization targets in the top seven presidential battleground states.¹ We measured a pronounced and profound positive impact for Vice President

Kamala Harris based on her performance using moment-to-moment dials, hot button analysis, and metrics ranging from head-to-head support and favorability to specific candidate traits and issue trust. **The results of this study reinforce the narrative that VP Harris scored a big win over former President Donald Trump in the first, and probably only, debate between the candidates.**

VP Harris saw double-digit gains in her vote margin over Trump, going from a +38 point² lead to a +51 point lead, as well as in her net favorability (*Image 1*), which moved from +15 to +39. Among swing voters specifically, VP Harris’ net favorability improved from +3 to +27. To be clear, this is not necessarily a representative sample of the national electorate but rather serves as a proxy for the kinds of voters VP Harris needs to persuade and motivate to win tight elections in the battleground states.

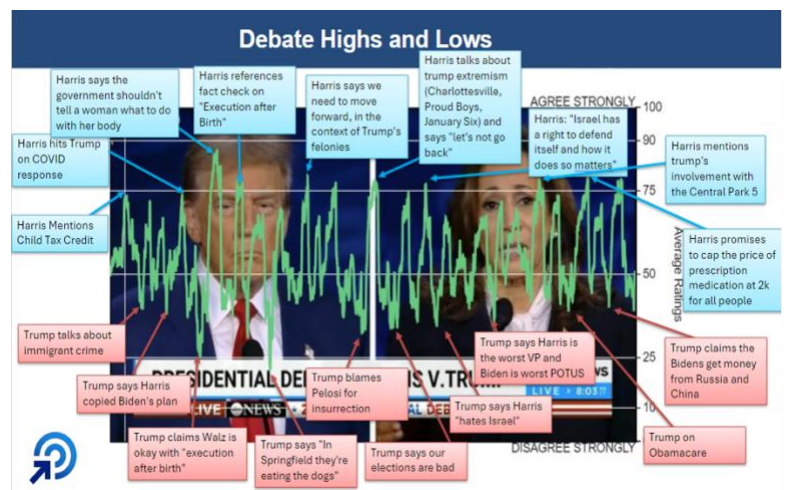


Image 1

¹ Swing voters are defined as at least one of the following: undecided/soft support for a candidate in the presidential race, splitting their tickets in the presidential and U.S. Senate race in their state, or holding unfavorable views of both candidates. Mobilization targets meet at least one of the following criteria: are Democratic or Democratic-leaning in terms of party identification, are single women, are voters of color, and may or may not have voted in the 2022 midterm election.

² The participant pool recruited for this study leans Democratic. For this analysis, we focus on changes between the pre-debate survey and the post-debate survey.

Dial-testing conducted during the debate underscores the extent to which VP Harris helped herself. Moreover, while Trump's lack of appeal was expected overall, the dials show he did nothing in the debate to improve his chances with these swing voters or land any attacks on VP Harris that harmed her with mobilization targets. In fact, as shown in *Image 1* above, many of Trump's attacks registered as the worst moments of the debate according to these swing voters.

Some important moments that stood out in the debate and may come as a surprise to some include:

- Voters reacted very positively to moderator fact-checking and to citations of those fact-checks by VP Harris.
- There is no evidence in this study that VP Harris' non-verbal communication or facial expressions generated any backlash. While previous debates saw that moments, like George H.W. Bush checking his watch or Al Gore sighing, distracted from the candidates' substantive performance, nothing like that appeared to have happened during this debate.
- The abortion exchange went about as badly for Trump and as well for VP Harris as possible. While not necessarily surprising, the intensity of feeling was off the charts, and Trump's lies about the murder of newborn infants did not resonate at all.
- VP Harris made some of her biggest gains of the night on the question of which candidate is more "for working people," where she gained +26 points versus Trump, taking a 74% to 14% advantage on that trait after the debate.

Taken together, this study serves to quantify just how resoundingly VP Harris defeated Trump in the debate and the progress she made in assembling the coalition she needs to win.

VP Harris Did Herself a Lot of Good

The debate improved VP Harris' topline numbers, with the ballot going from 58% VP Harris / 20% Trump / 22% third-party/undecided pre-debate to 70% VP Harris / 19% Trump / 11% third-party/undecided post-debate. Among mobilization voters, VP Harris led 66% to 20% before the debate and grew to 85% to 12% after the debate; among swing voters, she led 55% to 20% pre-debate and 64% to 21% afterward.

Similarly, VP Harris' favorability improved from 50% favorable / 35% unfavorable pre-debate to 64% / 25% post-debate. Notably, Trump's favorability on the pre- and post-ballots (20% and 19%, respectively) are virtually identical, and his favorability moved much less than VP Harris', going from 11% favorable / 75% unfavorable to 19% / 69%.

VP Harris' movement with swing voters is impressive; she went from 45% favorable / 42% unfavorable pre-debate to 58% / 31% post-debate. Among mobilization targets, she saw positive movement as well, going from 64% / 17% pre-debate to 81% / 7% post-debate.

VP Harris' performance generated a remarkable amount of intensity for her among the voters she needs to mobilize. Prior to the debate, only 14% of these Democratic-leaning mobilization targets said their opinion of VP Harris was "very favorable." After the debate, 53% characterized their opinion of her as very favorable.

The movement here is more about VP Harris doing well than Trump doing poorly. Both swing and motivation targets came into the night not completely sure about VP Harris, but they left the debate liking what they saw and heard from her. **70% said VP Harris performed better than they expected.** Meanwhile, 71% said Trump performed about as well as they expected.

Looking at what drives this positive change in perception of VP Harris, she gained significant ground on more centrist-coded issues and attributes. For example, her advantage as a “strong leader” went from +3 pre-debate to +19 after. Moreover, 49% described her performance as strong versus 25% who said the same for Trump and 68% called her performance confident versus 34% for him. Among swing voters, VP Harris trailed Trump in terms of being a strong leader before the debate, 30% for her and 39% for him, but after the debate, VP Harris had a 46% to 34% advantage on this. Similarly, 42% of swing voters called VP Harris’ performance strong compared to 23% saying the same of Trump’s.

On “shares my values,” she went from +41 to +59; on “committed to freedom,” she went from +27 to +43; and on doing what is best for America, she went from +20 to +44. Her advantage on “loves America” was +18 after the debate; prior to it VP Harris and Trump were viewed evenly on this trait.

The shift among swing voters was especially stark on issues related to patriotism and strength. Prior to the debate, 44% of swing voters said VP Harris would do what is best for America, with 31% saying that described Trump better. After the debate, 60% of swing voters said this described Harris better, compared to 23% saying it described Trump better. Going into the debate, VP Harris had a -7 point deficit on “loves America,” but after the debate, swing voters said “loves America” described VP Harris better than Trump, 42% to 38%.

The chart below shows VP Harris’ pre- and post-debate standing on a number of metrics:

Trait – All Voters	Pre-Debate		Post-Debate		
	Harris	Trump	Harris	Trump	Net
Cares about people	72%	7%	81%	6%	+10
Fit to serve	71%	10%	72%	13%	-2
For working people	61%	22%	75%	14%	+22
Honest and trustworthy	57%	6%	70%	7%	+12
Shares my values	54%	13%	75%	16%	+18
The type of leader I admire	51%	9%	66%	12%	+12
Committed to freedom	42%	29%	60%	26%	+21
Strong leader	37%	34%	50%	31%	+16
Loves America	36%	36%	48%	30%	+18
Flip flopper	30%	41%	31%	44%	-2
Corrupt	10%	74%	10%	78%	-4

For each descriptor, please say whether you think it better describes Kamala Harris or Donald Trump.

Trait – Swing Voters Only	Pre-Debate		Post-Debate		Net
	Harris	Trump	Harris	Trump	
Cares about people	68%	8%	79%	9%	+10
Fit to serve	67%	10%	70%	16%	-3
For working people	57%	23%	74%	14%	+26
Honest and trustworthy	53%	6%	64%	9%	+8
Shares my values	47%	14%	69%	19%	+17
The type of leader I admire	48%	11%	62%	15%	+10
Committed to freedom	40%	32%	57%	29%	+20
Strong leader	30%	39%	46%	34%	+21
Loves America	32%	39%	42%	38%	+11
Flip-flopper	38%	38%	38%	43%	+5
Corrupt	11%	76%	13%	75%	+3

For each descriptor, please say whether you think it better describes Kamala Harris or Donald Trump.

Importantly, Trump’s efforts — and a moderator question — to highlight VP Harris’ shifting positions since her 2020 presidential campaign failed to register, as perceptions of VP Harris as a “flip-flopper” remained flat while those of Trump flip-flopping on issues rose. Importantly, VP Harris expanded her advantage of being “for working people” by a net of +26 points, indicating that her economic messaging and positioning were effective.

Notably, on these comparative measures, it is VP Harris making gains rather than Trump losing ground that is leading to her improved positioning. The story is similar when it comes to who voters trust more on a variety of traits and issues:

Trust – All Voters	Pre-Debate		Post-Debate		Net
	Harris	Trump	Harris	Trump	
Listen and work together	73%	6%	80%	6%	+7
Respect the views of people who disagree with them	73%	3%	88%	4%	+14
Fight for the middle class	70%	10%	83%	12%	+11
Govern for all Americans	68%	11%	69%	9%	+3
Represent America well on the world stage	62%	18%	67%	17%	+6
Ensure all Americans have opportunities to succeed	61%	13%	79%	10%	+21
Protect freedom for all Americans	51%	24%	63%	20%	+16
Do what’s best for America	49%	29%	64%	20%	+24
Move the country in the right direction	49%	17%	64%	12%	+20
Keep their promises	44%	19%	46%	17%	+4

Make me proud to be an American	36%	8%		49%	14%	+7
Keep our country safe	30%	38%		43%	40%	+11

Please indicate whether you trust Kamala Harris or Donald Trump more to do each of the following thing.

On specific issues, VP Harris made the most headway when she was able to cite specific plans, especially ones she rolled out before the debate, including proposals related to housing affordability, healthcare, holding price gougers accountable and helping families with children. **Relatedly, one of VP Harris’s top moments in dial testing was when she talked about her child tax credit proposal.**

Among swing voters, VP Harris made big strides on key economic issues, including “the economy,” “helping families with children,” “controlling inflation,” “reinvigorating American manufacturing,” and “ensuring U.S. wins competition with Russia and China.” She also made gains with swing voters on trust related to the wars in Gaza and Ukraine.

Issue – Swing Voters Only	Pre-Debate			Post-Debate		Net
	Harris	Trump		Harris	Trump	
Women’s rights	87%	4%		92%	5%	+4
Abortion	86%	7%		88%	11%	-2
Affordable healthcare	79%	4%		75%	10%	-10
Helping families with children	69%	10%		85%	2%	+24
Education	67%	9%		66%	6%	+2
Protecting democracy	65%	14%		69%	17%	+1
Going after price gouging	59%	14%		63%	20%	-2
Making housing more affordable	57%	11%		67%	7%	+14
Stand up to big corporations	54%	18%		64%	23%	+5
Making sure trade deals are fair to American workers	44%	32%		43%	41%	-10
Rebuilding our infrastructure	30%	37%		40%	41%	+6
Immigration/the border	27%	56%		19%	59%	-11
Crime	27%	41%		30%	41%	+3
Controlling inflation	26%	40%		34%	39%	+9
The war in Ukraine	23%	28%		40%	36%	+9
Reinvigorating American manufacturing	22%	46%		35%	48%	+11
Handling A.I.	19%	19%		41%	16%	+25
The economy	18%	43%		38%	44%	+19
The war in Gaza and Israel	18%	31%		32%	35%	+10
Ensuring U.S. wins competition with Russia and China	14%	45%		29%	50%	+10

For each issue, please say whether you think Kamala Harris or Donald Trump would do a better job with handling that issue.

Live Reactions Underscore This Data

The top moments in our dial testing included:

- ✓ VP Harris saying the country needs to move forward from Trumpism in the context of Trump’s felony convictions.
- ✓ VP Harris saying the government and Trump should not tell women what to do with their own bodies.
- ✓ Trump being fact-checked after falsely saying Democrats believe in murdering newborn babies and Harris’ response.

The lowest points included Trump saying that Democrats want to execute newborns; Trump saying that Haitian immigrants are abducting pets and eating them; and his claims that the 2020 election was stolen from him. In addition to turning dials, respondents had “hot buttons” to call out particularly great or bad moments.

The candidates’ exchange over abortion is instructive — when Trump claimed Democrats support executing babies after birth, the dials turned extremely negative, and respondents made a point of calling it out with their hot buttons as a particularly bad moment. The dial line here gets so bad that it crashes into the chyron:



Image 2

The dials begin to spike back up during ABC moderator Linsey Davis’ fact-check of Trump’s post-birth abortion lie and continue to rise as VP Harris talks about protecting abortion rights. Voters also made a point of tagging this as a “great moment” in the debate during VP Harris’ discussion of abortion.³ This aligns well with respondents’ near-universal belief that VP Harris will be better for women’s rights and on the issue of abortion:



Image 3

VP Harris had a great moment with swing voters (seen in blue) when saying that Russian President Vladimir Putin would “eat [Donald Trump’s] lunch.” Swing voters were especially apt to call this a great moment as well:



Image 4

³ These dials included “hot buttons” that allow for fast reaction to both positive and negative sentiment. Respondents can use these buttons to call out particularly resonant moments, separate from the continuous rating dial slider.

VP Harris got a spike from both swing and mobilization targets when she said that both she and Governor Tim Walz are gun owners:

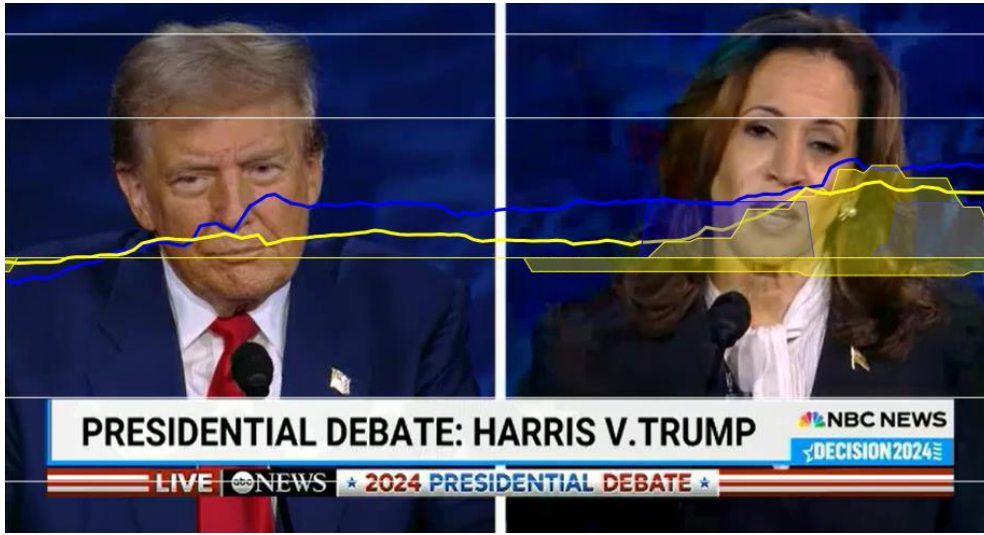


Image 5

Reactions among swing and mobilization targets were extremely positive toward VP Harris' argument that we "do not have to go back" to January 6 and Trump's chaos and lies:

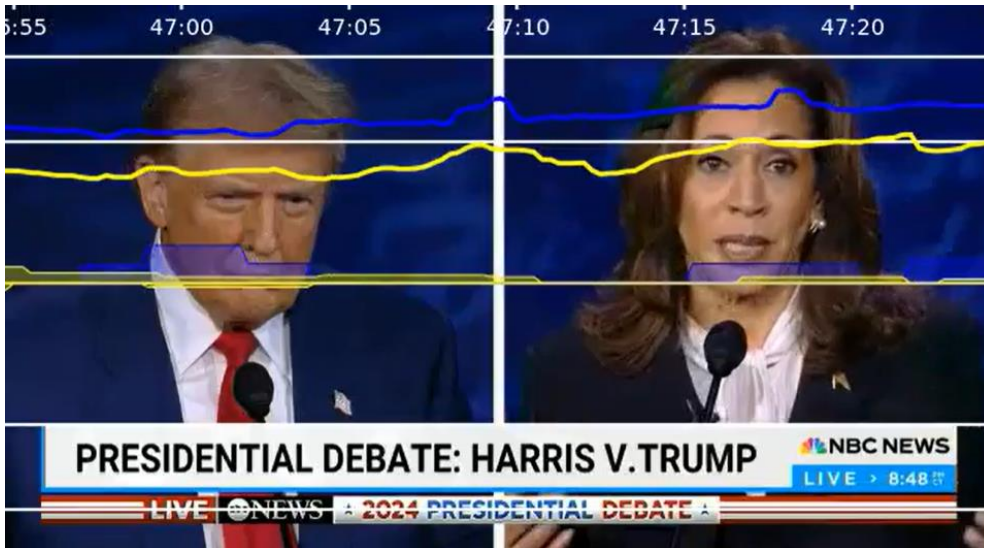


Image 6

VP Harris also received a lot of great moment hot buttons when she reminded Trump that she is “not Joe Biden,” underscoring the positive feelings toward her messaging around turning the page, moving forward and representing a changing of the political guard:



Image 7

VP Harris citing bipartisan endorsements from both Republican officials, former Trump staffers and former Vice President Dick Cheney got positive marks — including from Democratic mobilization targets:

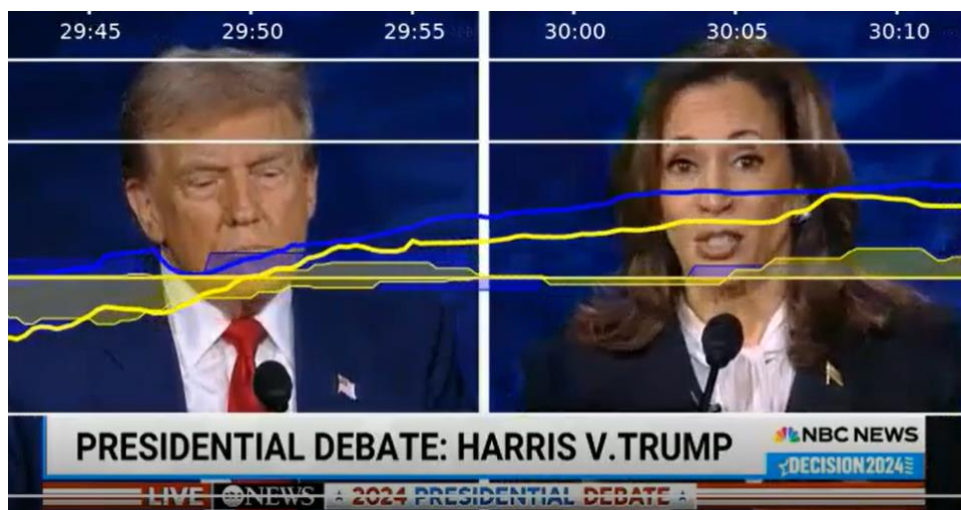


Image 8

In one of the night's most memorable moments, voters did not respond well to Trump's unhinged rant about dogs and cats being eaten by Haitian immigrants in Ohio. Not only did the dials with swing voters hit the lowest point of the night, but the hot buttons calling it a bad moment were near-universal:

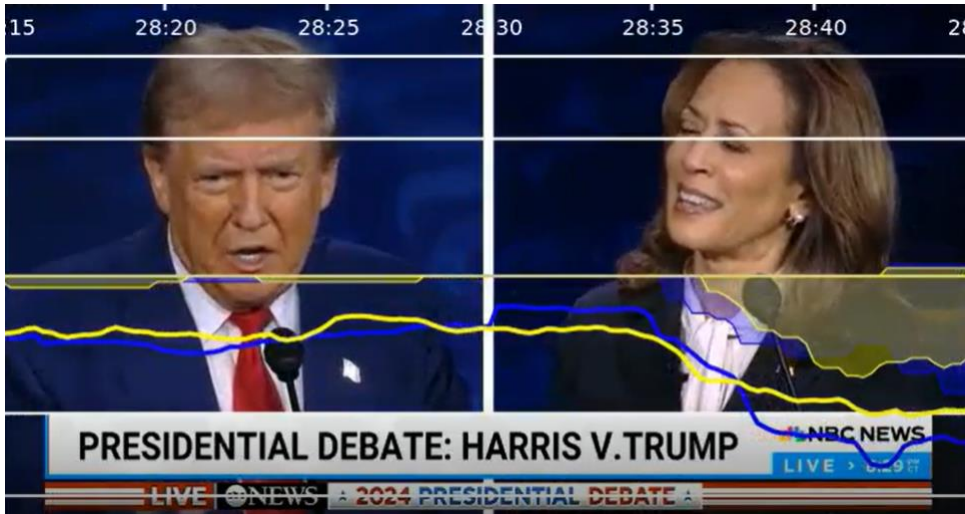


Image 9

In totality, it is clear VP Harris won the debate. Voters came in needing some reassurance regarding her views and values, and she managed to give that reassurance, while Trump did nothing to change voters' perceptions of him in a positive way.