

Harris' Emphasis on Maternal Health Care Is Paying Dividends With Black Women Voters

Their enthusiasm may be key for Democratic turnout at the polls in critical battleground states.

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Vice President Kamala Harris is seeing a surge of support from Black women voters, galvanized in part by her work on health care issues such as maternal mortality, reproductive rights, and gun control.

The enthusiasm may be key for Democratic turnout at the polls in critical battleground states.

Black women have always been among the most reliable voters in the Democratic base and were central to former President Barack Obama's victories in 2008 and 2012. Enthusiasm was also robust for President Joe Biden in 2020. But this year, before he bowed out of the race and Harris became the Democratic nominee, his support among this critical demographic had been fading, which could have dampened turnout in swing states.

Black voters' support for the top of the Democratic ticket has since increased. In July, before he left the race, 64% of Black voters supported Biden, according to the [Pew Research Center](#); 77% of Black voters supported Harris in August.

Black voter turnout, especially in rural areas of Georgia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania, could help propel Harris to victory. That support — especially among Black women — has swelled since Biden's departure, polling shows.

"This is a renaissance," said Holli Holliday, a lawyer in the Washington, D.C., area who is president of Sisters Lead Sisters Vote, a group that works to advance Black women's political leadership. "We're partnering with a collective of Black women organizations to collaborate and collectively move like we never have before."

Gun safety issues could especially resonate in Georgia, where both Harris and the Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump, are vying for the support of Black voters. A September 4 shooting at Apalachee High School near Winder, Georgia, killed four people and left nine hospitalized with injuries, with scores more facing [mental and emotional scars](#).

Eighty-two percent of Black women voters had a favorable view of Harris in August, according to the Pew Research Center, up from 67% in May.

And more Black women than before say they will go to the polls. Almost 70% of Black women said in August they were extremely or very motivated to vote, according to Pew, up from 51% in July. Sixteen million Black women in the U.S. are eligible to vote and 67% of them are registered, according to [Higher Heights](#), a political action committee focused on mobilizing and electing Black women.

Trump has also sought support from Black women voters. His campaign [released a video in August](#) showcasing Black women pledging to support him over Harris, pointing to his economic policies as a key reason.

Still, only 8% of [Black women voters say](#) the Republican Party does a better job of looking out for their interests, according to a poll done in May and June by KFF, a health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

Harris' attention to health issues particularly important to Black women is helping to draw their support, said Kimberly Peeler-Allen, a co-founder of Higher Heights. In 2021, the vice president called for a more robust government response to the nation's high maternal mortality rates.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says Black women are [three times as likely](#) to die from pregnancy-related complications as white women. The disparity is driven in part by differing access to quality health care, underlying health conditions, bias, and racism.

"The vice president's focus on Black maternal morbidity has gotten a lot of attention and gratitude," Peeler-Allen said. "High-quality and affordable care, as well as the economy, are one of the top issues that drive Black women voters to get to the polls."

As a senator, Harris co-sponsored a package of legislation aimed at improving maternal health, with a focus on Black women. The Biden administration pushed to expand maternal health initiatives in rural communities and improve bias training for health care providers, including by awarding more than \$103 million in grants in 2023 to support and expand access to maternal health care.

Trump in 2018 [signed legislation](#) intended to reduce the maternal mortality rate that provided \$58 million a year for five years to help states investigate and prevent pregnancy-related deaths.

As vice president, Harris also pushed states to extend postpartum care in Medicaid, the state-federal health program for low-income and disabled people. Biden signed legislation that temporarily gave states the option to expand the coverage to a full year from the required 60 days, with federal matching funds, and later signed a law allowing states to make the extended benefits permanent.

Illinois, New Jersey, and Virginia were the only states providing 12 months of postpartum Medicaid

coverage when Harris became vice president. Today, the yearlong benefit has been adopted by [at least 46 states](#) and Washington, D.C., according to KFF.

“I am so thrilled out of my mind. I didn’t think we’d get there that quick,” said Rep. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.), who has helped lead congressional efforts to reduce mortality and morbidity among mothers and pregnant women, especially Black women. “It helps having everybody at the Senate, House, and White House working together. I am optimistic we are going to have someone at the top who gets it. We still have a ways to go.”

Harris’ support for measures to stem gun violence also helps her appeal to Black women. Harris said during her debate with Trump last month that she’s a gun owner. But she has pressed for banning what are often known as assault weapons and to implement universal background checks ahead of gun purchases — issues that may resonate in Georgia, especially, after the Apalachee shooting.

Eighty-four percent of Black women favor Harris on gun reform over Trump, according to a [2024 poll](#) conducted for The Highland Project, a women-led coalition focused on creating multigenerational wealth in Black communities.

Trump’s campaign advisers have said he would protect access to guns by appointing federal judges who oppose restrictions. He has supported gun rights despite two apparent assassination attempts during the campaign, and as president in 2017 he reversed a controversial Obama administration regulation making it harder for people with mental health issues to purchase guns.

Win With Black Women, a network of Black women leaders, hosted a planning call with Black women the day Biden withdrew from the race. About 44,000 participants joined the meeting.

Waning enthusiasm for the Democratic ticket among Black women before Harris entered the race could have undermined turnout. And turnout matters: In the 2020 presidential race, seven states were won by [less than three percentage points](#) each.

“To have 44,000 black women on a phone call that Sunday night? That enthusiasm, that’s good for Democrats,” said Kelly Dittmar, research director at Rutgers’ Center for American Women and Politics. “If Democrats selected someone with less enthusiastic backing, a lot of women who supported Biden may have stayed home.”

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