

Empathy and the Economy: Twin Drivers of Vote

Persuading people that she's got the chops to deal with the economy as well as the empathy to understand their problems is a key task for Kamala Harris at her convention and beyond.

She's got competition: An analysis of ABC News/Washington Post/Ipsos polling data shows that the same to-do items top the list for Donald Trump.

Preferring Harris over Trump to handle the economy narrowly outweighs thinking she "understands the problems of people like you" in predicting vote preference for Harris. Harris currently trails Trump on the economy, while leading him in perceived empathy.

Both are strong elements of candidate choice, displacing traditional items – political party identification, ideology and race/ethnicity – as top predictors of vote preference in a statistical analysis called regression produced by for ABC by Langer Research Associates.

These predictors largely are consistent in predicting support for Trump. Thinking he's the candidate better suited to handle the economy again is the top predictor, followed closely by thinking he understands your problems.

Regression analysis holds variables constant to see which emerge as independent predictors of an outcome. In predicting intention to vote either for Harris over Trump, or Trump vs. Harris, models using only demographic variables explain 55 percent of the variance. Adding perceived empathy and trust to handle the economy boost this to 70 percent, a robust model.

After the economy and empathy, other predictors of preferring Harris over Trump include being a Democrat, having more education and being liberal. In predicting the opposite – a vote for Trump – further predictors include being a Republican, living in a rural area, having less education and being conservative.

The analysis marks the central importance of establishing both empathy and economic stewardship in attracting support. Current standings show why the race is close: Trump leads Harris by 9 percentage points, 46-37 percent, in trust to handle the economy, while Harris leads by 7 points, 40 to 33 percent, on empathy.

Notably, 26 percent currently don't prefer either candidate on empathy and 16 percent don't trust either on the economy. Those skeptical voters are ones to which Harris, and Trump alike, may best make their case.

Currently, they go in different directions: Among people who don't trust either candidate to handle the economy, it's 53-22 percent, Harris-Trump, with 18 percent intending to vote for someone else. Among those who think neither candidate understands the problems of people like them, by contrast, it's 49-35 percent, Trump-Harris, and 14 percent for someone else.

See more on the latest ABC News/Washington Post/Ipsos poll [here](#).

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Intention to vote for Harris over Trump in November was modeled using logistic regression, with binary responses from Q3_Q5net as the dependent variable, coded as 1) Harris/Walz and 0) Trump/Vance. That's flipped for intention to vote for Trump over Harris, with 1) Trump/Vance and 0) Harris/Walz. Independent variables are listed in the table below.

Predicting intended vote choice

	<i>Harris over Trump</i>		<i>Trump over Harris</i>	
	<i>M1</i>	<i>M2</i>	<i>M3</i>	<i>M4</i>
Female	-0.01	0.54	0.01	-0.54
Age	0.00	-0.02	-0.00	0.02
Education	0.27	0.65	-0.27	-0.65
Race/ethnicity: Black	1.41	0.55	-1.41	-0.55
Race/ethnicity: Hispanic	0.08	0.64	-0.08	-0.64
Race/ethnicity: Mixed, Other racial/ethnic minority	0.35	0.75	-0.35	-0.75
Democrat	2.45	1.23	-2.45	-1.23
Republican	-2.07	-1.46	2.07	1.46
Conservatism	-1.31	-0.63	1.31	0.63
Urbanicity: Urban	-0.06	-0.11	0.06	0.11
Urbanicity: Rural	-0.78	-0.97	0.78	0.97
Region: Northeast	-0.09	-0.39	0.09	0.39
Region: Midwest	0.65	0.95	-0.65	-0.95
Region: West	0.43	0.09	-0.43	-0.09
Understands the problems of people like you: Harris		4.78		
Understands the problems of people like you: Trump				4.78
Understands the problems of people like you: Neither		2.19		2.59
Trust to handle economy: Harris		6.13		
Trust to handle economy: Trump				6.13
Trust to handle economy: Neither		1.64		4.49
<i>Cox-Snell Pseudo-R-squared</i>	<i>0.55</i>	<i>0.70</i>	<i>0.55</i>	<i>0.70</i>

p < 0.05 bolded. Log-odds ratio coefficients are from survey-weighted logistic regression