

Review of Kamala Harris: Is she an Experienced and Forward-Thinking Leader?

Education and Legal Background

Kamala Harris has a solid educational foundation in law and political science:

- **Undergraduate Degree:** Harris earned a B.A. in Political Science and Economics from Howard University, a prestigious historically black university where she was active in student government and debates.
- **Law Degree:** She obtained her Juris Doctor (JD) from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. Her legal education provided her with the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for a career in law [1].

Professional and Political Career

Harris's professional career spans various significant roles in law enforcement and politics:

- **Deputy District Attorney:** Harris started her legal career in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, where she prosecuted cases involving gang violence, drug trafficking, and sexual abuse.
- **San Francisco District Attorney:** Elected in 2003, she served two terms and focused on criminal justice reform. One of her notable initiatives was the Back on Track program, which offered first-time, non-violent drug offenders educational and employment opportunities instead of incarceration [2].
- **Attorney General of California:** From 2011 to 2017, Harris was the Attorney General of California, overseeing the largest state justice department in the United States. Her tenure was marked by significant initiatives in criminal justice reform, environmental justice, and consumer protection. She played a crucial role in securing a settlement for homeowners during the mortgage crisis and was a staunch advocate for marriage equality [3].
- **U.S. Senator:** Elected in 2016, Harris served on key Senate committees, including the Judiciary Committee and the Select Committee on Intelligence. She was known for her incisive questioning and strong advocacy on issues like healthcare, immigration, and criminal justice reform [4].
- **Vice President of the United States:** In 2021, Harris became the first female Vice President, as well as the highest-ranking female official in U.S. history and the first African American and Asian American Vice President.



Significant Initiatives and Programs

Harris's tenure in various roles was marked by forward-thinking initiatives:

- **Back on Track Program:** Launched during her time as San Francisco District Attorney, this program aimed to reduce recidivism by providing first-time non-violent drug offenders with educational and employment opportunities. The program continues to operate and has significantly lower recidivism rates compared to traditional incarceration [5].
- **Environmental Justice:** As Attorney General, she established the first Environmental Justice Unit in the San Francisco DA's office, focusing on crimes against the environment, such as illegal dumping and air pollution.
- **Truancy Initiative:** Harris implemented a program to reduce truancy in San Francisco schools, arguing that truancy often led to crime. This initiative aimed to prevent future criminal activity by encouraging school attendance [6].



Comparison of Kamala Harris to the Last few Vice Presidents

1. George H.W. Bush (Vice President 1981-1989)

- Education: B.A. in Economics from Yale University.
- Professional Experience: Founded an oil company, served as Director of the CIA, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office in China, and Chairman of the Republican National Committee.
- Political Career: U.S. Representative from Texas, Vice President under Ronald Reagan, and President of the United States.

Comparison: Bush had extensive experience in both the private sector and public service, particularly in foreign policy and intelligence roles. Harris's career in law and justice, coupled with her legislative and executive roles, demonstrates a different but equally substantial breadth of experience, particularly in criminal justice reform and consumer protection [7].



2. Dan Quayle (Vice President 1989-1993)

- Education: B.A. in Political Science from DePauw University, J.D. from Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law.
- Professional Experience: Practiced law and worked as an investigator for the Indiana Attorney General.
- Political Career: U.S. Representative and Senator from Indiana.

Comparison: Harris's legal and prosecutorial background is more extensive, particularly her roles as District Attorney and Attorney General. Her work on significant reforms and legislation adds to her robust qualifications [8].



3. Al Gore (Vice President 1993-2001)

- Education: B.A. in Government from Harvard University.
- Professional Experience: Investigative reporter, served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War.
- Political Career: U.S. Representative and Senator from Tennessee.

Comparison: Both Gore and Harris have strong legislative backgrounds. Gore's focus on environmental issues parallels Harris's initiatives in environmental justice, while her criminal justice reform efforts offer a distinctive area of expertise [9].



Comparison of Kamala Harris to the Last few Vice Presidents

4. Dick Cheney (Vice President 2001-2009)

- Education: Attended Yale University, B.A. and M.A. in Political Science from the University of Wyoming.
- Professional Experience: White House Chief of Staff, Secretary of Defense, CEO of Halliburton.
- Political Career: U.S. Representative from Wyoming.

Comparison: Cheney's experience was heavily skewed towards defense and corporate leadership. Harris's background in law and her progressive reform initiatives provide a different but equally important skill set relevant to executive leadership [10].



5. Joe Biden (Vice President 2009-2017)

- Education: B.A. in History and Political Science from the University of Delaware, J.D. from Syracuse University College of Law.
- Professional Experience: Practiced law before entering politics.
- Political Career: U.S. Senator from Delaware for 36 years.

Comparison: Biden's extensive Senate career involved significant legislative accomplishments, particularly in foreign policy and judiciary matters. Harris's career, while shorter, is marked by her leadership roles in law enforcement and her impact on criminal justice reform and consumer protection [11].



6. Mike Pence (Vice President 2017-2021)

- Education: B.A. in History from Hanover College, J.D. from Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law.
- Professional Experience: Practiced law and hosted a conservative talk radio show.
- Political Career: U.S. Representative from Indiana, Governor of Indiana.

Comparison: Pence's experience as governor provided executive leadership at the state level, whereas Harris's roles as Attorney General and Senator highlight her deep involvement in legal reform and national legislative processes [12].



Response to Criticisms Based on Identity, Race, & Gender (DEI)

7. Kamala Harris (Vice President 2021-present)

- Education: B.A. in Political Science and Economics from Howard University; J.D. from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law.
- Professional Experience: Deputy District Attorney, District Attorney of San Francisco, Attorney General of California, U.S. Senator from California.
- Political Career: Vice President of the United States.
- Comparison: Harris's career includes significant legal and legislative achievements. Her initiatives in criminal justice reform, environmental justice, and consumer protection reflect her forward-thinking approach to policy and governance [13].



Response to Criticisms Based on Identity

Critics who argue that Harris is being positioned for higher office primarily due to her race, heritage, or gender overlook her extensive qualifications and accomplishments. Her career trajectory reflects a consistent focus on legal and social reform, backed by substantial professional and legislative experience. Harris's work on programs like Back on Track, her tenure as Attorney General of the largest state, and her impactful role as a U.S. Senator demonstrate her capability and readiness for executive leadership.

Conclusion

Kamala Harris's qualifications are robust and multifaceted, with significant contributions to criminal justice reform, environmental justice, and consumer protection. Her experience as a district attorney, state attorney general, U.S. senator, and Vice President places her in line with, if not exceeding, the qualifications of many of her predecessors. Her identity as a woman of color adds to the diversity of representation but does not detract from her substantial and demonstrable credentials as a capable and forward-thinking leader. Harris should be judged based on her actual stance, compelling education, and extensive experience.

References

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