

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

RACE IN THE 2024 ELECTION

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UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

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**BUSETTE:** Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you for joining us for our conversation on race in the 2024 election. I am joined today by some very, very impressive panelists and I'll introduce them in order. So we have Gabriel Sanchez, who is a professor of political science at the University of New Mexico and also a Brookings senior fellow. We have Rashawn Ray, senior fellow here at Brookings, and Adia Harvey Wingfield, who is a vice dean and professor of sociology at the Washington University in St. Louis. So welcome, all of you, for joining us. We are going to get right into things and we're going to talk a little bit about how Vice President Harris has been referred to by President Trump. So we're going to go right there and it's going to get more exciting from there. So let's let's get into it. So referring to Vice President Harris, former President Trump has said, I don't know, is she Indian or is she Black? If the National Association of Black Journalists. He went on to say that he didn't know that she was Black until a number of years ago when she happened to turn Black. And now she wants to be known as Black. He added that, quote, "She was Indian all the way. And then all of a sudden she made a turn and she went and she became a Black person." So in response to Trump's attacks on Harris racial identity, Harris herself has responded. "Honestly, I do not think it's a tragedy. I think it's a tragedy that we have someone who wants to be president, who has consistently, over the course of his career, attempted to use race to divide the American people. And I think American people want better than that." So I'm going to start with Rashawn and ask, what is your reaction to these comments and what are their implications for race in America today?

**RAY:** Well, thanks. Thanks so much, Camille. It's great to be with you. And gave an idea to have this important conversation at this time in American history. You know, it really shouldn't matter what her race is, what his race is, what what their gender is. But people know that it does. And Trump knows that race matters. Vice President Harris has tried to distance herself a bit for the same reason, because he understands how much it matters. And she really understands that we we look not only her race, but a gender and think about things intersectionality, how much those two social identities really matter in social life from outcomes from who ends up getting a job to who gets accepted to to a college, to who gets pulled over by the police. And of course, even who has the ability to run for president, being in Congress, be a senator, even be a vice president as well. But one thing that we know from research is that Blackness is fluid and that oftentimes identification has started to increase with people identifying as being multiracial. So whether we look at Vice President Harris and even former President Barack Obama, in many ways, they represent a really growing segment of the American populace. But there's another aspect of how we think about race, and that is not only just thinking about their social identity or even the way that people perceive them, because oftentimes those are two different things how people might view themselves versus how

other people view them. And that's part of what Trump was trying to hammer home with. His point is that culturally, though, Vice President Harris, who has identified as being Black on multiple occasions and definitely not discounting her Indian heritage as well, but she attended a HBCU, a historically Black college, a university in Washington, D.C., and Howard University, which is one of the crown jewels for Black Americans. She also became a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., which is the first African-American sorority founded in 1908. It happened to be founded at Howard University. But then, of course, we get into who she married, and people like to focus on that. But one thing that's interesting to me is when we compare, say, Trump to Harris and we look at their backgrounds and their families, that something becomes very apparent to me. The first thing is that when we look at VP Harris, it's an interracial family involving stepparent. She has two stepchildren and she's the one person who does not have biological children. Those are components that have become staples of American society in many ways versus Trump, who I believe has had three wives and has children ranging from 46 to 18. So when we put this together, we could think about what that looks like. So what becomes the point here? The point is that for Trump, he's aiming to really shave off in many regards Black voters by questioning VP Harris's Black authenticity and really trying to hammer home that, yes, she might say that she's Black, but she's a different type of Black. She's not native born Black. She's not a descendant of slaves. But again, I go back to that point that for Black people, we know that the one drop rule is continuing to be alive and well, suggesting that if you have a drop of Black blood, oftentimes that links us. And why is that? Because when we're out in social life, we're treated as such. And I think that's part of what V.P. Harris has been trying to say. So, to me it's more about how race is used. And we continuously see the way that is used in politics to matter and shave off key votes that can end up making a difference in who wins this election.

**BUSETTE:** Thanks for that, Rashawn. Adia, do you want to add anything to that?

**HARVEY-WINGFIELD:** I do. I think that Rashawn makes some really interesting points, and I'd like to add another aspect of the analysis to Trump's comments, and that is that I think in addition to trying to shave off Black votes, I think he's also trying to build on and appeal to his particular base of voters that he knows is very stable and loyal to him. And I think it's interesting in what's implied in his comments is this idea that Harris is somehow seeking an advantage by trying to present herself as a Black person, as if that is going to be something that in the broader society resonates as something that is that lift up or a leg up. I find that interesting because I think it's consistent with the ways that our ideas of race as a society have shifted over the about the past 50 or 60 years, where we now see research and data indicating that for large numbers of

white respondents, they see themselves as the most disadvantaged group racially and they see themselves as being persecuted. And the only group that's not necessarily receiving opportunities or attention or policies that are designed to support them. Of course, we also know as researchers that this is inconsistent with the data on the ground. As Rashawn pointed out, Black Americans experience significant disparities in virtually every facet of social life, from education to health to life expectancy and so forth. So it's not we know that, societally speaking, being Black does not result in a systemic advantage in pretty much any facet or any social institution of life. But we also know that there's a real discrepancy between that reality and how the realities of race are viewed. And I think that for Trump, this idea to present Kamala as someone who's striving for Blackness because it's perceived as an advantage and something that offers her an opportunity and a leg up is consistent with these distortions that float around in our society and our broader public around the very real realities of how race is structured and what those inequalities look like.

**BUSETTE:** Thanks Adia. Gabe wanted to make sure you had a chance to weigh in on this as well.

**SANCHEZ:** Yeah. Thank you, Dr. Busette, for the introduction and for inviting me to participate in this truly rock star panel of race experts to engage in a really important discussion about the role of race in the election. I think my colleagues hit on most of the high points. I'll be relatively brief with my comments, but I want to note that I think I agree with Dr. Ray that the context for this comment is former President Trump's focus on trying to cut into Democrats advantage with African-American voters. And, you know, context being this is obviously one of the most loyal Democratic subgroup of voters in the electorate, but a subgroup that has, at least through polling, shown some signs of potential vulnerability. We'll get into this, I'm sure, as the conversation continues. But we've seen in the data that Black men in particular have been a bit of a weak spot for the Harris campaign. So I think Trump's questioning of Harris's identity is obviously aimed at trying to cut into Harris's ability to really mobilize Black voters through descriptive representation, which is a concept political scientists like myself study intimately, which basically finds that all things being equal, particularly when voters of color get an opportunity which is rare, to see somebody that looks like them, particularly running at the highest levels, there's always a small push factor in the direction of a candidate that resembles your descriptive identity. So I think Trump strategically trying to undercut that, trying to to dissolve some of that relationship that she naturally has as a candidate. Right. I also think that the academic literature on the subject has found that over time, candidates of color like Vice President Harris do not have to emphasize their racial identities because their opposition clearly does that for them. And I think at the end of the day, Trump's approach is consistent with that overarching trend. And really the big picture point to me is the fact

that a white man believes he has the right to question another person's racial identity. I think speaks to his character and really the lack of respect that not only himself, but a lot of folks on on that side of the political aisle these days really lack respect for how important racial identity is to many Americans. So just even venturing into that space at the end of the day, hopefully right, is as a mobilizing effect for a lot of voters who might be turned off just by taking that approach in the first place. And then I think, you know, as noted, unfortunately, I think this is also very similar to the way former President Obama had his racial identity questioned during his first presidential run. I mean, it seems like light years ago, right? So many things have happened politically since his time in office, but many of us have likely forgotten about how President Obama is critiqued for being multiracial himself at that time period, even though some members of the Black political leadership questioned whether or not he was, quote unquote, really Black. So this is unfortunately just continuing a lot of that trend. And finally, I think the fact that Vice President Harris was wise not to take the bait on that issue, essentially taking the higher road about that issue in general and not engaging in a defense of her own racial identity and essentially reminds the voting public that Trump has consistently used race as a means of dividing the population. And again, hopefully by not moving into that space, getting into a back and forth on it, she puts the issues to bed and we move on to policy issues, which we all hope. Our voters will make their case for who they're going to vote for based on that and not these underlying issues about questioning somebody's identity.

**BUSETTE:** Thanks for that, Gabe. Yes, we do hope that voters will focus on policies. I but at the moment it does look like certainly President Trump's Trump and his campaign are obviously trying to draw attention to race in a variety of different ways that we're going to get into further in this conversation. We've talked a lot about how questioning on Vice President Harris's racial identity is a way to sort of try to pry apart the part of the coalition that might support her. But I also Adia want to talk a little bit about Trump and his own identity as a white person and what and what effect that has on the tone of the election.

**HARVEY-WINGFIELD:** Yeah, that's a great question and I think that's really important. We obviously have a lot of discussion about Kamala Harris and intersections of race and gender and what that means for her. We know that there is extensive data that show that women of color and Black women in particular face significant disadvantages in their workplaces. They are less they are more likely to be ambitious, but less likely to reach the top ranks of organizations. And they are significantly underrepresented in those workplaces. But Kamala Harris is not the only person in this race with a race and gender, right. That also is the case for Donald Trump. And to me, I think it's interesting to think about what those intersections of race

and gender mean for his opportunities, for his decisions, for the responses that he gets to, the things that he says, even in the juxtaposition between his actions and behaviors and how I think those would be likely to be received from other candidates who might not necessarily be white men in the race. I think the intersections of race and gender allow Trump to lend himself some legitimacy when he talks about being a protector of women, for example, even though he also has made a number of policy decisions that have been very detrimental to women in this country, both economically, in terms of health, in terms of opportunities for advancement and so forth. But I think that he's able to leverage those intersections of race and gender to fashion himself as someone who is protective of women, despite actively working to create detrimental opportunities for them. I think that the intersections of race and gender also offer Trump significant amounts of protection when we consider, just from a factual standpoint, the effects of his presidency and the types of personal characteristics that have been a part of his behaviors over the time that he's been in the body politic. This is a person who was impeached twice. This is a person who's been convicted of felony charges. This is a person who, as Rashawn pointed out earlier, has a series of relationships and wives and extramarital relationships. I don't think that were those things to be the case for Kamala Harris. She wouldn't necessarily be in the position that that she is in in this race. So I think it's useful to highlight not just how we know that the data show the intersections of race and gender create certain obstacles for women of color and Black women specifically. That's certainly true. The flip side of this coin that I think is equally important to pay attention to is how these same intersections of race and gender operate in a differential fashion to create certain advantages to where someone who is a twice impeached felon could still be within striking distance of the presidency.

**BUSETTE:** Thanks for that idea. So, Rashawn, I think idea makes such an interesting and sophisticated point about the different balances of the intersection of gender and race for each of those candidates. Just given our history and given how where we are now. But one of the things I'm wondering is, as we think about, you know, Trump as a white male candidate, somebody who has made with that somebody with that identity in that that, you know, that sort of profile has been making overt overtures to Black men. And it appears that some of that is working. And we don't want you to kind of maybe tease apart why that might be working and how this intersection of race and gender might be working to Trump's advantage to try to pry apart some of these from these voters in Harris's coalition.

**RAY:** Yeah, most definitely. I mean, as Gabe was saying earlier, there has been an encroachment and among the Black vote, and it's important for people to to really understand that in many states, whether it be

locally, statewide elections, definitely presidential congressional elections, the Black vote for Democrats drives their pathway to victory. And it's a fallacy and a stereotype that Black people vote less. Black people vote on par in many regards to their percentage of the population and in some presidential races, even vote at a higher rate than whites. So now that we've dispelled that part of what Adia was highlighting is this intersectional way, particularly for Black women and women of color, where they experience this double whammy. And I want to double down on this for a second because some of my work has elevated this. Particularly a key finding was a paper that I did with Sherry Sherry, Noyd, looking at the experiences of PhD students at top graduate programs, the places where where all of us had the opportunity to go. And one big finding that came out of that was that women of color, Black women in particular, perceived that their advisors had less respect for their ideas. And as I think about all the things that Vice President Harris has done as her time as vice president and said now on the campaign trail, I see that coming to fruition where she says something and people say she did not say it. It's like I just heard her say it. Right. And so it speaks to this less respect for their ideas, which means the counter to that is that oftentimes other groups ideas, even when they just say they have a concept of something all of a sudden become something that we follow. So when Trump says that he has a concept of a plan, people really buy into that. Whereas Vice President Harris might actually give us details. And people say you didn't answer the question that actually she did. And this is rooted in how we think about research. And so these things don't surprise us scholars when we hear them. I think, of course, that when we talk about Black men, what's very, very important for people to realize is that Black men feel excluded. Things are hard economically. Things are hard in regards to relationships. Many of them are lonely and often turn to social media because they actually don't trust the news. And when they do see themselves on the news, it's always that they're doing something bad. And many of them are just out here trying to work hard, trying to put food on the table, trying to take care of their kids. Just trying to live and simply living, as some individuals would say, is winning the championship. Too many Black men, based on what we think about life expectancy. And we know that former President Obama has really got on board and recently made some comments where he was being pretty direct with Black men. And I find that interesting for a couple of reasons. First, because as we were talking about before, Obama has been a professor, so he got a bit professorial. He got a lecture mode. That's not surprising, but that's also not any different from what I hear coaches, many of whom Black men do on the basketball court or the football field. Well, for some reason we act like that. We shouldn't do this when we start talking about politics, when we know in many regards he does operate like a sport in many ways and goes back and forth in the ways that we might think about. The big thing that I do amplify, though, is that potentially even more so than when Obama ran the first time in 2008, Black men are really engaged this time, and part of what is

being amplified are their thoughts, things that they think all the time, things that they say to one another that they haven't publicly said. And now we are getting that. At the same time, though, I find it perplexing that Trump is the person who they are supporting. When Trump has said some pretty some pretty horrible things about Black men in the past or even done some Black men and Black people such as, you know, credible lawsuits for not renting to Black people in some of his properties. And even an ad about the Central Park five and how they should actually get the death penalty. And we know that there that what they said was coerced and that they ended up getting out after having some things happen with them. So it's a level of selective amnesia that's happening. And it's pretty wild to me. And is the concept that we would call it in the social sciences and in social psychology is cognitive dissonance, and it's really a form of cognitive dissonance on steroids. So like, I mean, it's extreme. And on one hand, we might think that is age related. So as we were talking and I know Gabe will come in to talk about this when Obama ran 16 years ago, if a person is 30 years old, they were 14 when when Obama ran. Yeah, they knew that Obama was running, but they really didn't. They really weren't aware of everything. So part of what that means is, is where are they going to get news? Well, if they don't trust mainstream news, their local news or cable news, particularly cable news now they go to social media. When you go to social media, now you're listening to amateur communicators, many of whom who don't know what they're talking about, to be honest with you. Some do, but many don't. And so what I suggest is to actually find the factual information like find the direct source, and then you can make your perspective. But one thing is clear. No Black men are marginalized. They feel it. They experience it. And it comes out particularly being a gap for the Democratic Party, where Black men are saying for the past 60 years or so, you all have had the Black vote. As I said earlier, Black people in many places carry the Democratic vote and they're saying, we feel like you have taken our vote for granted. We don't hear us and see us enough in the policies that you're passing. And even when you say that they're for us, we actually look at the legislation and we see that is for everyone, that you're not simply aiming to help the most marginalized communities. And in that regard, there may be a growing segment based on polling. They may end up voting for Trump at most or not voting at least.

**BUSETTE:** Thanks for your time for that. Gabe, I wanted to turn to you from a couple of different questions. First, I want to kind of engage you on this question of race being used as a lightning rod in politics, in politics, which, you know, obviously is not new, as we've just been talking about in politics. But what is the historical record for how race has infused have been infused into political campaigns? And has it mattered in determining the winner, particularly in the modern era?



**SANCHEZ:** Yeah, excellent question. I'm going to speak a little bit to the intersectionality piece. Just a couple of points. As a professional pollster, I want to try to sneak in some polling data whenever I get the chance to. And then I'm going to tackle the larger question about historically, how has race always been a dominant factor in American politics? You all know me by now. I'm an eternal optimist. I always try to look for some bright spot in the data. And I think to me, the most powerful measure of the positive effect of the intersection of race and gender has really been the dramatic rise in voter registration among women of color, especially when we compare that back to 2020. I believe TargetSmart of our colleagues over there did some research where they basically just looked at voter registration across different demographic groups. Right after Harris was the Democratic nominee and compared that to that same period back in 2020. And the main take home finding was that there's been a dramatic shift in voter registration, specifically among Latinos, which I believe is about 150% increase relative to that same period in 2020, and then 175% increase among African-American women. So that's the positive power, right, that we see of that intersectionality that's working for Harris. We've also seen as a pollster, I stare at polling numbers, unfortunately, more hours of the day than I'd care to admit. And one positive trend in the data is, again, as Harris became the Democratic nominee, women of color in particular moved their attitudes towards their enthusiasm to voting away from voting against Trump to supporting Harris as the Democratic nominee. That's a very powerful finding in the data, primarily because we know when there's something positive as your source of enthusiasm, it tends to have a better impact on your motivation not only to vote, but to also mobilize others in your networks to engage in the election. So those are all positive trends that I think fit into the intersectionality role. But the other dimension that I'll add to it before I jump to the bigger picture of race historically is I think we can add to gender and race. A third dimension of age and polling, for example, has consistently shown that Harris, being significantly younger than both Biden and Trump, has been a mobilizing factor for many Americans, especially young voters who are not very excited. Let's be honest, to vote for the two oldest candidates, American in American history when it was a Biden versus Trump race and on the debate stage, I thought that contrast in age was obvious and stark. And so I think that's just another piece of what the demographic attributes of the candidates bring to the table. And as Rashawn noted, you know, when we think about young voters, right, we always have to remind ourselves we're talking about the Latino and African-American community, significantly younger than white voters are. So at least for Latinos, 1 in 5 Latino voters we project will cast a ballot in this race, have never voted in a presidential election before because this is the first time they've been old enough to do so. So I think it just adds to that dimension of how this is playing out for Americans. We have to remind ourselves differently across, you know, generational status, their age, etc.. But I really want to to kind of emphasize some of the points that

Rashawn made in terms of African-American male voters, because unfortunately, we're seeing the same trends among Latinos and the dynamic of gender. When we look at polling data, for example, we know that there's been unfortunately weak spots with both Black men and Latino men. But I want to make clear, we're not talking about a major shift, right? In most polls, we're talking about a single digit shift, 6 to 8% in either the Black male vote or Latino male vote. But unfortunately, when you couple that with a potential decrease in turnout among those two demographics in some of these key battleground states, that could be a big enough factor to actually impact the race. And I think the thing that I'll emphasize that I'm seeing in the data that's consistent with what Dr. Rey noted is especially when we listen to focus groups and I've listened to hours and hours of focus groups this election cycle among Latino males is the same thing that plays out. It's a perception that Latinos and Black men are feeling ignored or unloved by not just Harris, the Democratic Party overall, which is, I think, the main point that Dr. Ray noted. And I think the reason for that, when you listen closely to qualitative data, is when there's a focus on issues like abortion and reproductive health. That has been a dominant narrative for 2022 to now. A lot of men might feel that, hey, they're being left out of that discussion. And it's not to say that they don't feel those issues are important, but they might say, what about what about me? Right. How is the economy going to help me, especially when we know that the. Economy is probably the biggest factor that's going to decide. Right. The context of how all voters are going to decide the election. Right. So with that out of the way. Right. Let's talk about your question that you framed, which is an important one, right. And a great one because it allows us to make clear that what we are seeing now from the role of race being used to divide the population for electoral gain is far from new in the United States. In fact, I've often argued that race has been how the major parties have framed their campaigns historically. Right. Not just today. Many places across the world. Right. We think about how the parties sell themselves to voters, how they organize themselves politically is often right done through social class. I'm the party for the working class, etc., on the party for this segment of the economic base in the United States. However, I've often argued that race is how we organize ourselves politically. Not so much by social class. And I think that explains why the overwhelming majority of high income African Americans vote democratically. And for Democratic candidates, when some might say that might be contrasting with their economic concerns or interests. And it also helps explain why lower income whites support the Republican Party's candidates overwhelmingly so when most policies that they put forth right are directly against the economic interests of that subgroup of voters. So political scientists have, like myself, found that, you know, looking at not just the race of a candidate impacts voters perceptions about them. But unfortunately, skin color is a powerful factor in how voters evaluate candidates with darker, darker skin candidates across racial groups, unfortunately, having a lot harder time with voters. And I think that speaks to the powerful role of race. You know, not just

historically, but continuing into the day into how voters think about those issues. We've also seen race used to try to shut down redistributive policies aimed at extending safety net resources to lower income Americans. Framing these issues often around race, whether we're talking about welfare policies or child care, but using stereotypes to suggest that some people of color and nowadays immigrants are milking the system to take resources away from others that might be perceived as more well-deserving. All of this plays into the prominent role that race is played over time. And finally, and maybe what I'm most concerned with and my own academic research these days is that social scientists have consistently found, unfortunately, that racial diversity that's taking place across the country is again, unfortunately leading to a significant shift to more conservative policy views. A large segment of the voting population. In fact, I'm working on an academic project right now where we explore the relationship between diversification and attitudes towards the insurrection. And we find, unfortunately, that many Americans who are experiencing racial diversity, seeing a greater influx of people that don't look like them in their county or their city, is actually leading them to a perception that the insurrection at the end of the day, that was just a protest that went out of hand. It wasn't anything more than that. And unfortunately, preliminary evidence is suggesting that people who are experienced in diversity are more likely to accept violence as just a part of our modern political system. So I'm very scared about that and especially scared of the prospect of the situation even getting worse if Harris actually wins in November. Because let's not forget that the majority of Americans who were surveyed at the end of Obama's two terms in office reported that they felt race relations actually grew worse after Obama's time in office. So again, I try to stay positive and optimistic when I can in the data, but sometimes you just have to tell things the way that the data is playing out in front of you.

**BUSETTE:** I appreciate that, Gabe. And that was wonderful and a lot there. I'm going to I want to move to Adia because I also want to, in this conversation talk a lot about how the candidates are and excuse me, how all each of the candidate candidates are talking about what it means to be an American. So I want to start by asking a desire to contrast kind of the two visions of what isn't a you know, who who is an American, according to our our two candidates. And then to talk about on how that might and how that has repercussions in the context of an election like this one.

**HARVEY-WINGFIELD:** Yeah, that's another fantastic question. I think the differences are pretty clear and pretty stark. I think that on one side, we see a candidate who presents real legitimate Americans as people who are predominantly white, who are in rural parts of the United States, who are Republican voters and who first and foremost express complete and total fealty to him. And then I think on the other side, we have a

very different picture. We have a candidate who, by my view, seems to want to make an argument that Americans, by and large, are a big tent and that there are a lot of opportunities to reach and connect with and interact with a variety of Americans and to want to respect those who come from a variety of different backgrounds, have different experiences and have different viewpoints and histories and life experiences and so forth. And these are starkly divergent presentations of what it looks like to be an American, but they also have long term historical precedent. There has historically been a legal, political and economic focal point in making sure that those who were considered Americans with all the rights and privileges bestowed upon were people who were primarily white and white men in particular. That has been the precedent in the United States for most of its history and only recently has started to see some expansion and some change where in women of all races, people of color were included in that definition of what makes someone legitimately an American. So what we see from the Trump campaign is this effort to to kind of harken back to this earlier era where those definitions of citizenship, of legitimate sitters, citizenship were much more constrained and much more exclusive. And I think that what we see from the Harris campaign is an effort to move in the opposite direction, to widen those boundaries and to widen that that discussion. I think that has interesting implications and overlay for how we see the race unfolding, because it's consistent with each of those candidates kind of personal biographies and their own personal, racial and gender identities. It makes sense for someone like Kamala Harris to want to offer a more inclusive, more a wider and more inclusive vision of what it means to be an American citizen. It also makes perfect sense from a strategic standpoint for someone like Donald Trump to try to narrow that window and to to close it off and to make it more exclusive and more more restrictive. But the thing that I always come back to when I think about these issues is kind of where we see the country going in the foreseeable future, right? America is not the America of 2000. It's not the America of the 1980s. I'm dating myself and showing my age a little bit here. But it's just true, right? It's not the America of even my parents generation of the 1950s. This is a country that is becoming increasingly more multiracial. It is on path to at least potentially becoming a multiracial representative democracy. And the question that I always ask myself is what that looks like. What kind of country are we prepared to have? Are we prepared to have a country that is attuned to that basic demographic reality that it is becoming more multiracial, that it is becoming younger than it is, including more people of color and more people who see things differently? Because if we are our organizations, our politics, our institutions can't continue to be retroactive and equipped for a period of time that we have already left behind. And I think that it's really clear that we do have a presidential candidate that is very determined to harken back to a previous era and to try to manifest that previous era as one that was superior and one that was better and one that was more more optimal and more idealized. But the truth of the matter is that that's not where we are anymore. That day is

behind us, and we have a future that's ahead of us. The question for me becomes how equipped are we going to be for that future? Are we going to restructure our institutions and our organizations and our social life to meet where our future is going? Are we going to continue back pacing ourselves in ways that don't lend the don't lend ourselves as a country to the future that we inevitably have on our hands? And I think that we have candidates with two very different visions of what that looks like. But we also have the reality of the numbers in the society, and the question is still open about where we're going to go.

**BUSETTE:** Great. Thank you very much for that. Gabe and Rashawn. I want to channel bit more about who's an American, who's an immigrant, who's an immigrant, how we talk about immigrants, particularly in this election. So Gabe I'm I'm going to I'm going to go to you first. And as you know, former President Trump was in Aurora, Colorado, yesterday and has been particularly strong in continuing to press his view that immigration is not good for the United States and that there are risks to the US, to American culture, there are risks to American workers. And that, you know, as he said very clearly, that on day one, he would take some pretty aggressive stances and enact some pretty aggressive policies around containing immigration and removing recent immigrants and returning them to whichever country they have come from. So with that background, I want to ask a little bit about I. This discussion around immigration and the way it's been framed seems very there's only kind of a very long historical legacy of doing that in the United States. Immigrants are taking our jobs is not new to this particular campaign. But what is new about this, about the way Trump is talking about immigration? I want you to give us a little bit of a sense of that. And then also, how are different demographic groups reacting to what might be new in that argument?

**SANCHEZ:** Yeah. I greatly appreciate this question. I've probably been asked more about this topic than any other by reporters over the last few months because it's such a powerful factor, you know, not just in this particular campaign, but what we've seen over the last several election cycles. And as you noted, you know, Trump's been in Colorado, in Aurora this week pushing this anti-immigrant rhetoric really in an area. Right. That is part of his argument in Colorado of immigrants overwhelming the country and pushing this fear about the otherness of immigrants. And one thing to point out strategically about Trump's presence in Colorado, he doesn't have a shot of winning that state. No pollster is going to tell you he does. So it's not about like trying to rally his base in Colorado. He's symbolically placing himself in areas where he's been saying they're overrun with immigrants. There's all these problems with these these immigrants that bring all these challenges to our country to try to aim at his base and other areas of the country. Right. So he's really doubling down on this in a way that isn't important and somewhat unique in how we approach his campaign

style. But let's remember, right when former President Trump came down that escalator to announce his presidency way back in 2016, remember the words he used to launch his campaign, recalling at that time Mexican immigrants, rapists and murderers? Right. We forget about this, but he's basically just continuing that same playbook and chosen to double down on this anti-immigrant rhetoric, this election, largely because he feels that this is a weak spot for Democrats. For both Biden and Harris in particular, and especially if he can connect that to the economy. Right. And I think that's where we think about the historical narrative about immigrants, because it's really important to remember and I try to explain this to reporters every chance that I get, that scapegoating immigrants has been part of our American political history throughout the full history as a nation. Right. In short, whenever the economy is struggling during an election cycle, politicians from both sides, and we have to be honest about this, have blamed immigrants who have little power politically to defend themselves when they're essentially scapegoated for any of the economic challenges facing the country, whether it was Irish and Italian immigrants or Asian immigrants at different periods in American history, or more recently, Latino Americans or Haitian immigrants. The immigrant community has always been who gets the blame when elected officials don't want to take accountability for their policies, failing and addressing economic concerns among voters. That's just been part of our fabric of American history and thinking about our political reality. And in this election cycle, where the economy is once again the major theme for the policy debate between both candidates in poll after poll is identifying that economic concerns like inflation and the rising cost of living overall are the dominant concerns among basically all subgroups of the electorate. The Republican Party has continued this trend of blaming immigrants for the challenges facing the country. The Trump campaign and a host of other GOP congressional candidates this cycle have essentially argued with no evidence whatsoever that immigrants are taking Americans jobs. Right. They're the reason to blame for low wages, even most recently, why Americans cannot find affordable housing. Essentially, they're saying it's all because of immigrants. They're the reason for all of these challenges as well as are the rise in crime and especially thinking about violent crime. Right. So I think it's important to note that research overwhelmingly shows that immigration actually enhances economic growth as a powerful driver for positive economic outcomes. And there's absolutely no relationship between immigrants and a rise in crime rates. Right. I think that the reason that we're seeing a lot of this play out is misinformation. But I think Pew put out a study recently that found that eight out of ten Americans have already heard false claims about immigrants and immigration, specifically from candidates, not just from a friend or somebody in their network, but candidates essentially putting out misinformation with no facts behind them that are driving. I think some of the conservative attitudes that we've seen about immigration in this election cycle. I mean, you asked an important question. What's different or nuanced about what we're seeing now? I think part of this is

the reaction and the traction that it's getting among some certain segments of the voting base that we're not used to seeing. And that includes African-Americans and Latinos, particularly males, among those subgroups. And it's ironic to me, right, that Trump is trying to frame this right in part of his comments about immigrants taking, quote unquote, Black jobs. The irony behind that is African-Americans. Right. A lot of people don't realize this are more progressive or liberal on immigration than even Latinos on maybe the most progressive on immigration over time in polling of any subgroup of the overall population. So the irony of trying to play into this, right, is definitely trying to undercut this underlying notion of the economy and trying to pick up. Votes by framing immigrants being a challenge to that particular subgroup of the population. Finally, and maybe most importantly, is that because we're seeing a shift and more concern on on border enforcement, even among Latino voters this cycle than we've seen in the past, the Democratic Party itself has moved to the right on how they're thinking about immigration. In years past, there'd be a really a complementary approach of path to citizenship for immigrants coming from Democrats, but also attention to border enforcement. Now, I think you see even Democrats across the country, starting with border enforcement, but then reminding folks all along, we also want to do path to citizenship. And I think that's a direct response to, unfortunately, the traction that Trump's getting with a lot of voters to trying to frame the economic concerns. Again, old playbook with immigrants being the reason that we're seeing all these challenges.

**BUSETTE:** Thank you, Gabe, for that. I want to remind our audience that we do look forward to getting your questions and you can send those to us on X. @BrookingsGov, you can also with the #raceinelection24. You can also reach us on events@brookings.edu. Reason I want to move you and ask a slightly different question about the discourse around immigration. I think it's pretty clear that there is an intersection in this discourse between the discussion of race and the discussion of who is an American. I think it's probably not accidental that in the last few weeks a lot of the rhetoric, negative rhetoric on immigration has focused on Haitian immigrants and Venezuelan immigrants, both of whom I, I, you know, have African roots, because they many of them were are descendants of the slave of Africans who were brought over to the American Americas during the slave trade. So I want you to comment a little bit on that and maybe what the political strategy is there.

**RAY:** Yeah. So I think when we start talking about Haitian immigrants in particular and of course is coming from Ohio and false allegations, I want to use the word false before about individuals taking people's pets and doing things with them. I mean, these sort of things have not have not been proven to to be true. And it's

important to say that. But it is important to know, Camille, to your question, why Haiti? Why Haitian immigrants? Well, if people know anything about Haiti and of course, a lot of the narrative now is that, Haiti is impoverished and it doesn't have the resources that it needs and it doesn't have the leadership. Yeah, but but historically, the question becomes why? Well, Haiti was essentially the first country to gain its independence by fighting back through a slave slave revolt. And people around the world, countries have not let Haiti forget that through the way that he taxes it, the way that it literally strips away is natural resources. So we have to understand where that's coming from. I think the other thing, and Gabe laid this out is there are a lot of various pathways for people to become part of the United States and various demarcations. And of course, one big one is people having the right to vote. And make no mistake, then, when we're talking about immigrants, whether it's from Haiti, Mexico, Venezuela, it is a concept that we call group threat theory. And we've been talking about it, all of us. Adia brought it up. Gabe brought it up. You've brought it out, Camille. Where it's where a group ends up posing a political, economic and or cultural threat to the status quo and oftentimes to the majority group. And that's part of what's happening. Part of what's happening. Adia mentioned a zero sum game earlier. There's a lot of political science and sociological research showing that white people, white men in particular, are more likely to view society as a zero sum. What does that mean? They view opportunity as a lake instead of an ocean. They view it as it's a pie or a pizza, and it's only so many slices to go around instead of realizing that opportunity can actually expand. And so it's important to note that. And what they're also saying is that they're not used to competing with everybody. I think that's something that we don't talk enough about that they are not accustomed to competing with everybody. And it's what Arlie Hochschild calls it is about being strangers in their own land, particularly white rural Americans who end up perceiving these other groups as threatening what America was to them, the legacy of it, the nostalgia of it. And this is why slogans like Make America Great Again resonate so much with people, with everyone. Either it elicits a very positive response or negative emotional response. That's because depending on whenever you thought it was great, there means that whatever has happened since then is different, or that it was great for you then and it wasn't great for other people. And I think that that is that is kind of in many ways what highlights in in to Gabe's point the Blacks jobs comment that that Trump made that immigrants were coming over taking Black jobs. It wasn't like he said jobs that are predominantly he says they have Black jobs like the way that he said it. And part of highlighting this is to, again, encroach on what Gage said, that Black people in America are again more progressive on immigration. They're basically all of the group. So it is to encroach on that, to infuse some type of doubt that their experiences and the interactions that Black people have with Puerto Ricans, the interactions that Black people in the Southwest have with individuals coming from Mexico, another in other South American countries and act like that those



alliances aren't made, that they are he is trying to threaten that alliance in many regards that some people have built up in their communities. And part of this is thinking about this. Some people actually feel that jobs are not available, so they try to identify then someone who to blame. And this is important because for Black men, Black men are overrepresented in the top 20 occupations that are reported to not be around in the next ten, 20 years. And they are underrepresented in the 20 fastest growing occupations. So they really feel that until your last point about what is being done, what could be done about this? Well, look, I think in this race, there are two candidates. Robert Kennedy Jr. Has now dropped out of the race and indefinitely and condolences to the family for for his mother passing away and his other siblings having having to deal with that. And as we think about that, I think VP Harris put together some policies that really speak to President Roosevelt's New Deal policies, which at the time excluded Black Americans overwhelmingly. So when we talk about Make America Great Again, that's partly what made America great again following World War Two, were New Deal policies. So. So a lot of us go to that. But accordingly, what VP has said is, aiming to ensure that community college is accessible and in many ways free, that people can get \$25,000 down on a new home. Also engaging in student loan forgiveness. These are all pathways to opportunities where if you help people deal with debt, you help them get education, you help them get a home, you help them get a good job. All of a sudden you set people up. And I think part of what's key is that there are a lot of Americans, whether it be individuals living in rural America, whether they be Black men in urban areas or the suburbs who feel left out of these equations in terms of what it means to not only have opportunity, but the fact that America is supposed to be the land of opportunity. So in that regard, there are individuals even living in our country who are citizens who were born here, who actually don't feel as though this country is for them.

**BUSETTE:** Thank you, Rashawn, for that. So we've got some questions from our audience. And I want to I want to start with one on Latina voters. So Gabe wanted to you had mentioned that new voting registration is pretty high among Latino voters. And I know you've done some previous work describing how important a constituency they are generally. So I want you to I maybe give us a little bit more texture about what some of the main issues are for Latina voters this time and why you think that they might be registering in such high numbers and are so are so engaged.

**SANCHEZ:** Yeah, it's a great question. And it's an opportunity to remind viewers out there that this team of of speakers on the panel today put out a blog post that's available at Brookings now that you can, you know, chase some of the data points that we're referencing. So that might be helpful. And all of us have posted

prior blogs that cover a lot of the content that we've been discussing, including I've done a lot of work on the Latina population that folks in grab data points, you know, go go find out where the polling numbers are, etc.. But the main frame that I want to approach when thinking about Latinos is they represent for the overall electorate an important demographic, not just because of the important role they themselves play as voters, but they're also for the Latino community, often the most dominant messengers that engage others in the process. Latinos and particularly Latinas, overwhelmingly don't get mobilized by the traditional political system as much as other racial and ethnic groups do. When we ask people basic questions in surveys, has anybody ever contacted you this election cycle to get you interested in voting to figure out what your policy issues are? Latinos within the Latino community overwhelmingly face a disparity where nobody is reaching out to them. But despite all of that, they're incredibly enthusiastic and projected to vote in high numbers. And I think a big reason for that is not so much some of the policy issues that we know and have been talked about a lot in depth, reproductive health care and abortion, which are key, important drivers for the Latino community, especially we saw in 2022. But just like all voters, it's the economy that's driving their interest and enthusiasm. And Latinas, unfortunately, over the past several years have been one of the communities that have unfortunately suffered the most economically and are still continuing to struggle financially. So they're looking to this election to figure out how their economic well-being and that of their families. Right. Can can improve it and see some some overall economic upward mobility. But the reason why we pay a lot of attention to Latinos come this election cycle is if we look at their voting trends over time, we go back to 2016. Was their high point for Democratic vote share? Don't quote me on this, but they were roughly our data suggested somewhere around 86 to 88% support for Hillary Clinton in that election cycle. So that's a huge number. But unfortunately, over time, that number has dropped down in the high 70s. This election cycle, somewhere around 65 to 70% support. So obviously, people look at that data and say that's a weak spot right there. They're moving away from, you know, Democratic Party in wide numbers. They must be moving to Trump. The reality is, right, a lot of those folks are moving to independent status and potentially looking at this election cycle as maybe an election where they're not as engaged and enthused about democratically and maybe will sit out this election. And I think that's something that we're paying close attention to, to figure out what messaging themes can bring them back into the electorate, get them interested in the context of voting. And one of the silver linings there is for that particular group of voters, and we track this in the data we've had over samples of Latinas who are eligible to vote but have not quite gotten that next step of becoming registered and looking to vote. And one of the most powerful messages that increases their enthusiasm in becoming registered and voting is protection of, quote unquote, women's rights. And I think in an election cycle where unfortunately, women continue to be demonized for thinking

about their underlying rights. Right. And reproductive health care being challenged, reminding folks how consequential this election cycle is, not just for the immediacy of who's president, but the long term projection of the Supreme Court. I think that's the dominant theme that energizes Latinas and brings more of those folks into the fold.

**BUSETTE:** Thank you, Gabe, for that. So Adia, one of the questions we're getting here is and so the context is, you know, there's obviously a bit of a difference in which gendered voters are more engaged with which candidates. So, for instance, Kamala Harris has a lot more female support. Trump has a lot more male support. So the question is whether or not. The kinds of policies that are articulated by each of those candidates can appeal to the part of the electorate that they're not appealing to now. And if so, how might that be possible?

**HARVEY-WINGFIELD:** Yeah, that's another really interesting question that actually I was thinking about before on this panel when Rashawn mentioned how this focus on reproductive freedom and reproductive rights may be cast as a women's issue and that that may be seen as something that doesn't really appeal to men. I can see that argument, but I think that to the extent that that argument is true, it is really a failure of how we think about and define understand reproduction and parenting in this country. To the extent that it does get construed as something that is a woman's job and a woman's responsibility. But we also know that when we talk about reproduction and when we talk about the certainly the greater kind of basic physical impact that reproduction has on women, we also know that it doesn't happen in isolation or in a vacuum. Right. And so we know that when we have laws in place that make it more difficult for women to access reproductive care, that doesn't simply impact women, it impacts the people who are part of their families. It impacts the people who may already be the children that they have living that they want to stay alive for. It impacts the workplaces where they are employed. It impacts the community groups that they are a part of. So these issues of reproductive rights and freedoms are things that we have framed as a gendered issue that disproportionately impacts women. Again, I don't want to give as a parent myself, I'm not trying to give the impression that there is not a very particular physical relationship that occurs when we're talking about parenting and child rearing and just the physical aspects of being a biological parent. But I also think it's really critical that we reshape and rethink that idea of reproduction as being a woman's issue, because it isn't just a woman's issue. It is a larger community issue. And I think that when we talk about it that way, certain policies that could be enacted into place to address these types of issues, not only enacting more reproductive freedoms, but thinking about the fact that the United States distressingly is still one of very few

developed countries that does not have paid parental leave. And I didn't say paid maternity leave. I said paid parental leave, because that is a significant facet in this country that helps to explain some of the economic disparities that we have. Those are examples of policies that impact all of us. Those are impacts of policies that have a significant impact on why we still continue to see such economic disparities. And I think if we think about those aspects of things that may seem gendered in this context of how they have a broader impact, but how they also speak to these concerns that voters say that they have about the economy. We can talk about why we also don't have sick, paid sick leave that's available. We can talk about why we have seen such difficulty improving the minimum wage and what that means for families, for men, women, children, all groups and families. I mean, these are things that I think may initially lend themselves to being gendered policies, but also really have implications for how we understand what our society looks like and how various groups are able to benefit from broader implications of these policies that might start off seeming gendered, but really have more implications for all of us.

**BUSETTE:** Thanks, Adia. Rashawn a question that we've gotten here is, is there any aspect of the conversation on race in this election that has not been shaped by Donald Trump?

**RAY:** Yes. I mean I mean, look, I think when we start talking about race in America, race, unfortunately, and racism in particular is a bedrock of American society and it has a tenet throughout. And so as we think about this particular election, I think part of what happens with Trump is that Trump is in some ways is like lighter fluid that you put on a grill, like a grill is already heating up. It's already stuff going on. But Trump then throws out a lighter fluid on it. So these are already conversations that people are having. He puts it into the mainstream accordingly. It's important for people to realize that what Trump has done are two things. First, his rhetoric as a presidential candidate really matters, helps people to feel emboldened in places where Trump campaign that in 2016, hate crimes increased over 300%, 300%, simply by him saying things that people thought they would allow. And then, of course, we saw the pinnacle of that with January 6th. Accordingly, what his rhetoric does, it really enhances in moves. Right? The the the way that we think about the the Overton Square and how we think about what's happening there in regards to people's language is part of what happens. And so as we think about the Overton window and how that plays out, that means language and comments that people may that were previously out of bounds as political candidates are now inbounds. And that Overton Window has shifted to the point where everything is allowed. And I think that that's what's interesting is we have to think about what political candidates say, who we want to represent us as a country and what that means for us moving forward.

**BUSETTE:** Thank you very much, Rashawn. Gabe, this is a quick last question, but has touches on the most recent climate disasters that we've had mostly in Florida, but also has, you know, touched other states as well. It's pretty clear that we are going to have some very significant migration patterns in the US over the next 20 years that are driven by climate change. I'm wondering from your perspective, how you think the topic of race might influence the ways in which the US deals with that?

**SANCHEZ:** Yes, it's maybe a great last point, because I think from the last questions perspective, I would answer it very similarly. Right. Is Trump causing any of this? No. Obviously, Trump's taking advantage of this underlying racial tension that's always been in the country. And as I noted earlier, I think a lot of this is the changing underlying demographics of the nation where we're just seeing greater interactions with with minority communities, immigrant communities. For a lot of white Americans that have never, ever had that personal experience with some of these folks that don't look like them. And I think as a result of the economy, climate change, we're going to continue to see populations move into areas. Right. That they're not accustomed to. And that generates the opportunity, right, for for greater positive social interactions that could actually lead to greater harmony, overarching perceptions that at the end of the day, we have a lot more in common with each other than difference. Right. So there's that positive potential of this changing migration that will bring people together across race, immigration, a lot of other demographics. But unfortunately, we're already seeing in the data that the immediate reaction that a lot of people have when they see people who are different or others from themselves is a negative one. Because at the end of the day. Right, psychology tells us that when we're faced with a new experience, Right. Something that we're not used to, the immediate reaction is to be fearful. Right? To be frightened. And I think we all, as Americans, have to take advantage of an opportunity to utilize this interaction. That is awesome, right? That's what makes America such a great country, is the opportunity to engage with people from a number of different walks of life to try to use that as a positive opportunity to remind all of ourselves we are a nation of immigrants and a nation of difference that uses that strength to build our overall American identity and not allow ourselves to get bogged down into the fear element of just that interaction with people that we're not used to seeing. But we do know at the end of the day, we're going to see greater demographic change. It's just a question of what that will lead to a positive or unfortunately, a negative outcome for all of us to live with.

**BUSETTE:** Thank you, Gabe, for those final words. I want to thank our panelists, Adia, Rashawn and Gabe, for a fascinating, fascinating discussion. And with that, we are done. Thank you for joining us.