

Fact-checking Kamala Harris and Donald Trump's first 2024 presidential debate

Former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris debate Sept. 10, 2024, in Philadelphia. (AP)
By [PolitiFact Staff](#) September 11, 2024

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It started off friendly. Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump shook hands to start their first presidential debate Sept. 10 in Philadelphia.

But the amicable vibes faded fast as Trump and Harris sparred over topics including abortion and immigration.

The fiery debate was hosted by ABC News moderators David Muir and Linsey Davis, who sometimes interjected to fact-check answers to questions.

Harris often directly addressed Trump while replying to moderators' questions; he stared straight ahead. Harris attacked Trump's criminal conviction in New York and other indictments after he spoke about crime during the Biden administration.

Moments after the debate ended, singer-songwriter Taylor Swift [said](#) on Instagram that she would be voting for Harris. Here's how the candidates' answers stood up to the facts.

RELATED: [Live fact-checking Kamala Harris and Donald Trump's first 2024 presidential debate](#)

Trump repeats debunked claim about Haitian immigrants in Ohio

Trump: "In Springfield (Ohio), they're eating the dogs, the people that came in, they're eating the cats. They're eating, they're eating the pets of the people that live there."

[Pants on Fire!](#)

A [city spokesperson told PolitiFact](#) that claims that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, are stealing neighbors' pets to eat are unfounded.

A Springfield spokesperson said the city has received no such reports, and Springfield police told a local news outlet the department has received no reports of pets being stolen and eaten.

As many as 20,000 Haitian immigrants have come to Springfield. Since 2023, some Haitians have come to the U.S. through the [Department of Homeland Security's](#) humanitarian parole program that lets people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela and their immediate family members request to come to the United States legally. They can be paroled into the U.S. for up to two years.

Harris says Trump will impose a sales tax

Harris: "Economists have said that (the) Trump sales tax would actually result for middle-class families in about \$4,000 more a year."

[Half True.](#)

Trump has repeatedly proposed wide-ranging tariffs on foreign goods, including a 10% to 20% across-the-board tariff and a 60% levy on goods from China. Although tariffs are imposed separately from the tax system, consumers would feel their impact much the same way as taxes.

However, the specific dollar impact on consumers varies. Two estimates we found generally support Harris' \$4,000 figure; two show a smaller, though still significant, impact.

Trump's wrong on abortion claims

Trump: "But the governor before, he said, 'The baby will be born, and we will decide what to do with the baby.'"

False.

Trump said West Virginia. He meant Virginia.

Former Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam, a Democrat and a physician, never said he would sanction the execution of newborns. What he did say during a 2019 radio interview is that in rare, late-pregnancy cases in which fetuses are nonviable, doctors deliver the baby, keep it comfortable, resuscitate it if the family wishes, and then have a "discussion" with the mother.

The issue is that Northam declined to say what that discussion would entail. Trump puts words in the then-governor's mouth, saying doctors would urge the mother to let them forcibly kill the newborn, which is a felony in Virginia (and all other U.S. states) punishable by a long prison sentence or death.

Trump: "Every legal scholar, every Democrat, every Republican, liberal, conservative, they all wanted (abortion) to be brought back to the states where the people could vote."

False.

The 1973 Roe v. Wade decision inspired legions of supporters and opponents. Before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned it in 2022, numerous legal scholars wrote briefs urging the court to uphold the ruling.

Some legal scholars who favor abortion rights have criticized the 1973 ruling's legal underpinnings, saying that different constitutional arguments, based on equal protection, would have provided a stronger case. But legal experts, including some who held this view, said those scholars would not have advocated for overturning Roe on this basis.

Jobs under Biden-Harris are not 'a fraud'

Trump: "It was a fraud, just like their number of 818,000 jobs that they said they created turned out to be a fraud."

Pants on Fire.

The federal agency that calculates how many people are working handed Democrats an unwelcome present during their August national convention in Chicago: a downward adjustment of the past year's employment gains by 818,000 jobs.

But Trump claimed the Biden-Harris administration was cooking the books, calling it "fraud" during the debate. However, economists across the ideological spectrum reject Trump's claim. The process is an annual effort to fine-tune initial data that the agency acknowledges is imperfect.

21 million immigrants did not come into the US

Trump: "Millions and millions of people ... are pouring into our country monthly. Where it's, I believe 21 million people."

False.

During Biden's administration, immigration officials have encountered immigrants illegally crossing the U.S. border around 10 million times. When accounting for "got aways" — people who border officials don't stop — the number rises to about 11.6 million.

But encounters aren't the same as admissions. Encounters represent events, so one person who tries to cross the border twice counts as two encounters. Also, not everyone encountered is let into the country. The Department of Homeland Security estimates about 4 million encounters have led to expulsions or removals.

During Biden's administration, about 3.8 million people have been released into the U.S. to await immigration court hearings, Department of Homeland Security data shows.

Harris' claim about employment under Trump

Harris: "Donald Trump left us the worst unemployment since the Great Depression."

False.

The [unemployment rate](#) spiked to a post-Great Depression record of 14.8% in April 2020, as the pandemic escalated. Trump was in office then. But he didn't "leave" Biden or Harris with a post-Depression record unemployment rate. By December 2020, the unemployment rate had fallen back to 6.4%, which was high for recent history but well below numerous spikes during recessions.

Trump's ridiculous claim about Venezuela and criminals

Trump: "Do you know that crime in Venezuela and crime in countries all over the world is way down. You know why? Because they've taken their criminals off the street, and they've given them to (Harris) to put into our country."

Pants on Fire!

There is [no evidence](#) that countries are emptying their prisons — or mental institutions, as he also claimed at the debate — and sending people to illegally migrate to the U.S.

Immigration officials arrested about 103,700 noncitizens with criminal convictions (whether in the U.S. or abroad) from fiscal years 2021 to 2024, federal data shows. That accounts for people stopped at and between ports of entry. Not everyone was let in.

The term "noncitizens" includes people who may have had legal immigration status in the U.S. but were not U.S. citizens. The data reflects the people that the federal government knows about, but it's inexhaustive.

Although Venezuelan government data is unreliable, some data from independent organizations shows that violent deaths have recently decreased. From 2022 to 2023, violent deaths dropped by 25%, according to the independent Venezuelan Observatory of Violence. Criminologists attribute this decline to Venezuela's poor economy and the government's extrajudicial killings, not the government emptying its prisons and sending criminals to the United States.

Trump misleads on Biden-Harris inflation

Trump: Under Biden and Harris, the U.S. had "the worst inflation we've ever had."

False.

The highest year-over-year inflation rate on Biden's watch was [around 9%](#) in summer 2022. That was the highest in about 40 years.

The highest sustained, year-over-year U.S. inflation rates were recorded [in the 1970s and early 1980s](#), when the price increase ranged from 12% to 15%. For one year — 1946, after the U.S. won World War II — the overall year-over-year inflation rate exceeded 18%.

Also, the year-over-year inflation rate has fallen since its 2022 peak under Biden. It was at 2.9% in July 2024, the [most recent month](#) available.

Trump's claims about 2020 election results

Trump: Referring to the lawsuits he and allies filed alleging irregularities in the 2020 presidential election that he lost, "No judge looked at it. ... They said we didn't have standing. A technicality."

False.

The lawsuits failed for different reasons. Some were dismissed for lacking standing, which means the judge ruled that the plaintiff didn't have a stake. Others had errors in the filings. But in many cases, judges determined that the allegations lacked proof.

A Campaign Legal Center [analysis](#) found at least 10 cases that were decided on the merits.

Did Harris meet with Netanyahu?

Trump: Harris "wouldn't even meet with (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu when he went to Congress to make a very important speech. She refused to be there 'cause she was at a sorority party of hers."

Half True.

Harris did [miss the July 24 speech](#) Netanyahu made to a joint session of Congress. Instead, she made a previously scheduled [keynote speech](#) to the Zeta Phi Beta sorority. (Harris is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.)

Harris [met with Netanyahu](#) the following day.

Trump distorts Harris' record on police funding

Trump: Harris "has a plan to defund the police."

[Mostly False.](#)

The Trump campaign has pointed to statements by Harris in 2020 — not in 2024. Shortly after George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer, Harris was asked about the "defund the police" movement. She called for "reimagining" public safety. She didn't explicitly call for getting rid of police departments, but she offered support for reexamining police budgets and lauded a proposal by the Los Angeles mayor to shift part of the police budget to community initiatives.

Harris did not call for dissolving police departments; she said police were necessary. She told The New York Times in June 2020, "We're not going to get rid of the police."

A Trump campaign spokesperson [highlighted on X](#) comments by Harris in a [June 2020 radio interview](#) with actor Nick Cannon, in which she said "we have to redirect resources" from police to other areas of government such as schools and small businesses.

Harris said, "We have to reimagine public safety in America" and argued that "for too long, people have confused achieving public safety with putting more cops on the street."

Trump did not save the Affordable Care Act

Trump: On the Affordable Care Act, "I saved it."

False.

During 2016, Trump campaigned on repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act. As president, he sought to repeal the measure — and failed.

But his administration pursued a [variety of policies](#) that hindered the law's reach and effectiveness, including cutting millions of dollars in advertising and outreach funding. He cut subsidies to insurance companies that offered coverage on the exchanges. He also took regulatory steps to permit less-expensive and less-comprehensive health coverage — for example, [short-term health plans](#) that didn't comply with the ACA.

During the Trump administration, [ACA enrollment dropped](#) and the [number of uninsured Americans rose](#) by 2.3 million from 2016 to 2019, including 726,000 children, the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) reported.

Trump and the Taliban

Harris: When he was president, Trump "invited the Taliban to Camp David."

True.

Trump invited the Taliban to meet at Camp David before canceling the meeting.

[In September 2019](#), Trump said he was canceling a planned, secret meeting for peace talks with Taliban leaders at Camp David, the famous Maryland country retreat for presidents. The meeting was scheduled to take place Sept. 8, 2019, three days before the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

[Trump said](#) his team's monthslong peace talks with the extremist group were over because the Taliban had killed a U.S. soldier a few days before the meeting. "You can't do that. You can't do that with me," Trump told reporters.

[In February 2020](#), Trump and the Taliban signed a deal to end the war in Afghanistan within 14 months.

The negotiation [called for](#) the release of up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners held by the Afghan government. News reports and statements from Afghanistan's president said the release happened. Afghanistan officials said they freed the prisoners at the U.S.' request.

Prisoners, migrants and gender transition

Trump: Harris "wants to do transgender operations on illegal aliens that are in prison."

Mostly True.

We haven't heard Harris address this in her 2024 presidential run, but Trump's campaign said he was referring to Harris' response to a 2019 [questionnaire](#) from the [American Civil Liberties Union](#), a legal civil rights organization.

"As President," the questionnaire asked, "will you use your executive authority to ensure that transgender and nonbinary people who rely on the state for medical care — including those in prison and immigration detention — will have access to comprehensive treatment associated with gender transition, including all necessary surgical care? If yes, how will you do so?"

Harris checked the box for "yes" and wrote, "I support policies ensuring that federal prisoners and detainees are able to obtain medically necessary care for gender transition, including surgical care, while incarcerated or detained."

Harris also pointed to [her work](#) as California attorney general, saying she "pushed the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to provide gender transition surgery to state inmates."

When Fox News hosts asked about the questionnaire Sept. 10, Harris' spokesperson Michael Tyler said, "That questionnaire is not what she is proposing or running on." When we asked the Harris campaign about her current position on the issue, it provided no additional information.

Reporting from [NPR](#) and [The 19th](#) shows access to gender-affirming surgery in federal prisons is limited, and inmates have gone to court over access.

Harris misleads on Project 2025

Harris: "In (Trump's) Project 2025 there would be a national abortion, a monitor that would be monitoring your pregnancies, your miscarriages."

Mostly False.

Harris misleads by linking Trump to a proposed requirement in Project 2025 that he has not backed, and she also exaggerates the recommendation.

[Project 2025](#), developed by many conservative groups, does not recommend monitoring each woman's pregnancy. The document says federal abortion surveillance and maternal mortality reporting systems are inadequate and proposes withholding federal money from states that don't report their abortion numbers to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

It says that the statistics should be separated by category, including spontaneous miscarriage, treatments that incidentally result in fetal death (such as chemotherapy), stillbirths and "induced abortion."

The document separately calls for a "pro-life politically appointed Senior Coordinator of the Office of Women, Children, and Families" to replace the senior gender coordinator at the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In an April interview with Time magazine, Trump said some states "might" choose to monitor women for illegal abortions. He told the reporter to "speak to the individual states."

Trump cherry-picks to say crime is up

Trump: "Crime here is up and through the roof."

Mostly False.

The National Crime Victimization Survey, which the Justice Department conducts annually by surveying Americans about crimes they have experienced, shows a 43% increase in violent crime from 2020 to 2022. But the other main federal study of crime, conducted annually by the FBI and based on official crime reports from law enforcement in most jurisdictions in the U.S., shows a decline from 2020 to 2022.

It's unclear why the two surveys diverge so much, experts say. But by focusing only on the victimization survey, Trump is ignoring the FBI data through 2022.

Meanwhile, more recent data, which is preliminary or calculated separately from the federal government data collections, shows that crime is going down.

Both the FBI's preliminary data for 2023 and multiple nongovernmental efforts to track crime data in 2023 and 2024 have found a decline in violent crime since the last annual FBI data, which covered 2022.

Although such analyses show violent crime is consistently falling, a few nonviolent categories of property crimes, such as auto thefts, have risen in the past few years.

Harris' trade deficit claim misses the mark

Harris: "The Trump administration resulted in a trade deficit - one of the highest we've ever seen in the history of America."

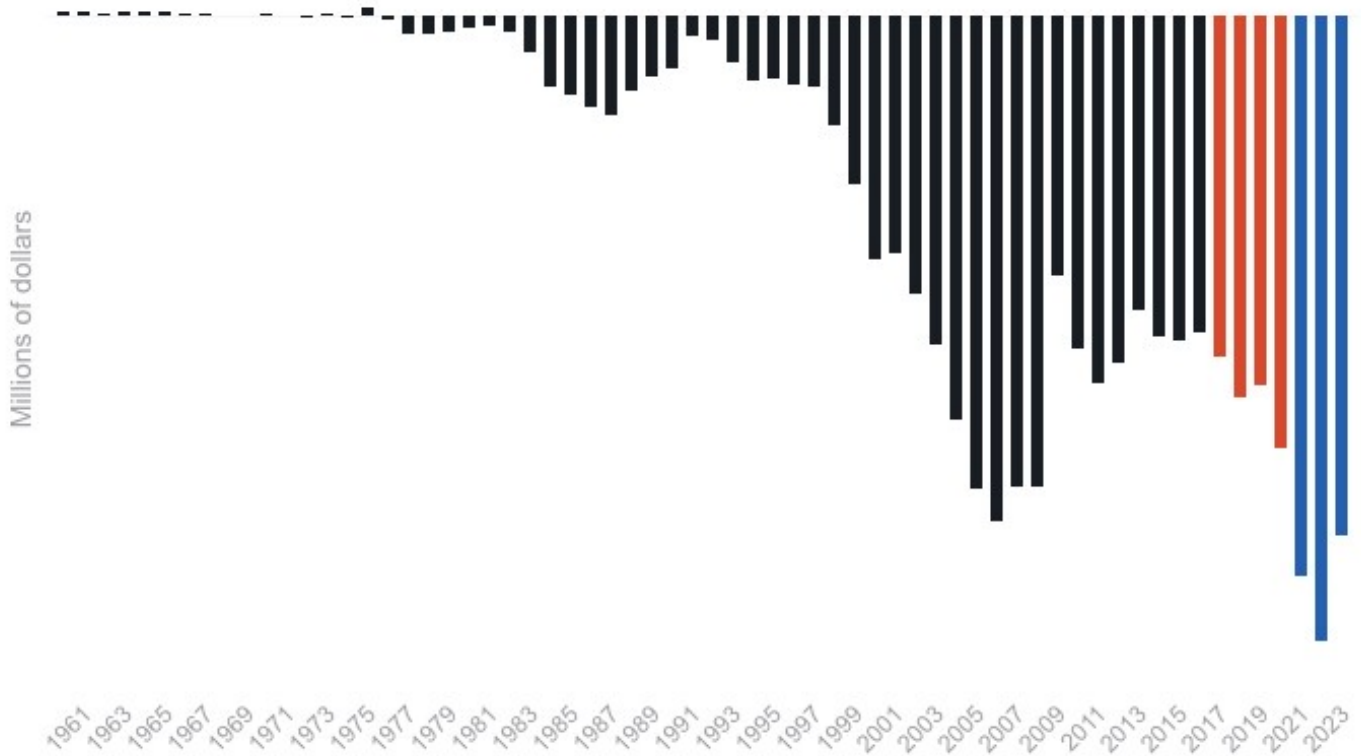
Mostly False.

At its largest, the trade deficit for goods and services under Trump was about \$654 billion in 2020. That's larger than most post-World War II presidents, but Harris glosses over that the final four years under President George W. Bush each produced a larger trade deficit than Trump's biggest.

And the trade deficit has been even bigger under the Biden-Harris administration. In each of the first three years under Biden and Harris, from 2021 to 2023, the trade deficit has been larger than it was during Trump's worst year. It set a record in 2022.

Kamala Harris exaggerated how big the U.S. trade deficit was under Trump, compared to other presidents

U.S. trade balance for goods and services. Donald Trump's presidency in red. Joe Biden's presidency in blue. Other presidents in black.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Spread the truth

Domestic oil production has hit record highs under Biden

Harris: "We have had the largest increase in domestic oil production in history."

Half True.

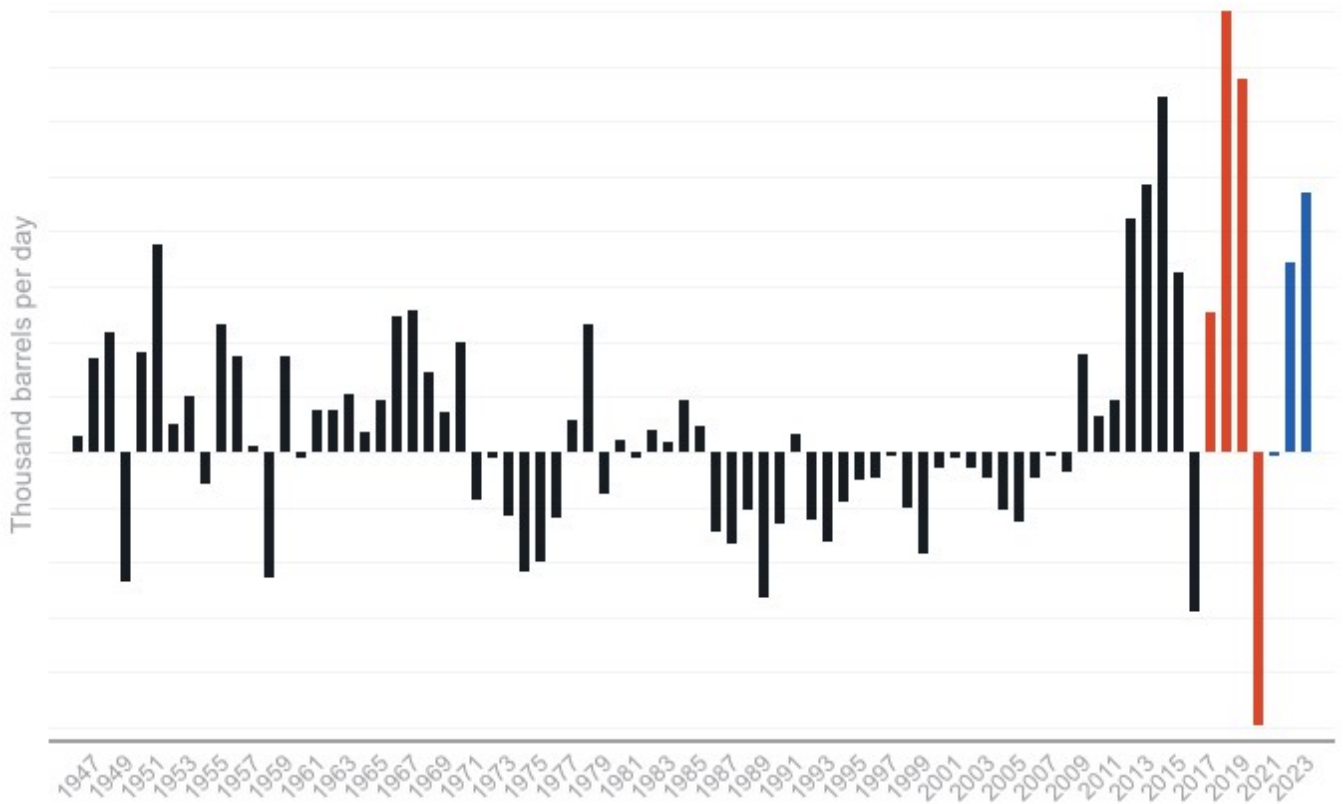
Harris has a point that overall oil production under Biden has set records. However, the administration didn't oversee the largest increase ever.

Today, the country is producing more crude oil than any nation ever has, averaging about 13 million barrels a day in 2023, U.S. Energy Information Administration [data](#) shows.

The U.S. has led the way in production over other countries, including Russia and Saudi Arabia, for the past six years. Production has accelerated under Biden, who has approved [more drilling permits on public lands](#) than Trump had in the same point in his presidency.

What undercuts Harris' claim, however, is that other presidents - including Trump and former President Barack Obama — oversaw larger year-to-year increases on U.S. oil production than Biden, according to [historical data](#).

Trump, Obama had higher yearly increases in oil production than Biden-Harris did



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