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VP Harris's Path to The White House: Winning a Supermajority of Moderate Voters



Lucas Holtz, Political Analyst

Takeaways

- Vice President Kamala Harris needs to win a supermajority of self-identified moderate voters in nearly every battleground state in order to win the White House.
- If Trump manages to win about 90% of conservatives in the battlegrounds, then he will only need a sliver of the moderate vote to put him over the top.
- The Vice President is running slightly behind where Biden ended up with moderate voters in 2020. Improving those numbers could put her above 50% total support in the seven battleground states.
- Harris is closest to hitting the necessary moderate support thresholds in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, and Nevada—winning the first three of those battlegrounds alone would be enough to put Harris over 270 electoral votes.

The path to the White House runs through the center of the electorate—especially for Democrats. Since 1980, they have only managed to win a single presidential election when they did not have over 60% of moderate voter support nationwide—and even in that anomalous year, they won 56% of moderate voters. In 2020, self-identified moderate voters broke for Joe Biden 62%–36% over Donald Trump, and Biden won a supermajority of moderate voters in the battleground states that he flipped from red to blue. Vice President Harris is working to replicate this coalition, but as it stands today, she still has room to grow to get where she needs to be with moderate voters.

Winning a Supermajority of Moderate Voters

If the 2024 electorate looks like it did in 2020, as many political analysts believe it will, then we can project how much of each ideological group Trump and Harris will need to win in the core battleground states to earn their electoral college votes. Because conservatives make up a larger portion of the electorate than liberals do, Trump doesn't have to look far beyond his base to win, while Harris has a tougher path to victory that requires the support of a broad ideological coalition.

Conservatives make up a plurality of the vote in every battleground state, and if Trump manages to win about 90% of conservatives in the battlegrounds, then he will only need a sliver of the moderate vote to put him over the top.

Harris Must Win a Supermajority of Moderate Voters

Battleground state electorate ideology.

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Arizona	39%	33%	28%
Georgia	42%	32%	26%
Michigan	39%	32%	28%
Nevada	36%	34%	30%
North Carolina	42%	32%	26%
Pennsylvania	37%	34%	29%
Wisconsin	42%	30%	28%

Source: 2020 AP Votecast Data.



Meanwhile, Harris needs a supermajority of moderate voters in each of the battleground states in order to win the White House. Taking averages of the highest quality polls from the battleground states, we calculated what percentage of the moderate vote Harris is currently winning, how this compares to Biden's support, and what moderate support level she would need in order to reach 50% of the total vote in each battleground and foreclose Trump's path. Our results show that Harris is running slightly behind where Biden was with moderate voters in 2020, and she is further behind her ideal goal that would put her above 50% total support in the seven battleground states—but she has time to close this gap. (Given the percentage of undecided voters in these polls, it is not a 1-to-1 comparison to Biden's final support percentages. Harris has an opportunity before her to win these undecideds and close the gap to Biden's support.)

Our polling average shows that Harris is currently at 62% support with moderate voters in North Carolina (exactly at Biden's support level), 59% support with moderate voters in Wisconsin and Georgia (5% and 6%, respectively, below Biden's support level), 58% in Pennsylvania (1% below Biden's support level), 57% in Michigan (5% below Biden's support level), 56% in Arizona (3% below Biden's support level), and 55% in Nevada (3% below Biden's support level). Given where things currently stand, Harris is closest to hitting the necessary moderate support thresholds in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Arizona, and Nevada—winning those first three battlegrounds alone would be enough to put Harris over 270 electoral votes.

Inversely, Trump's threshold to win the battleground states is much lower than Harris's. Trump can get away with winning below 40% of moderate voters and still win the presidential election. Trump only needs to win 33% of the moderate vote in Georgia, 34% in North Carolina, and 36% in

Wisconsin in order to reach 50% of the total vote in these battlegrounds. Meanwhile, Harris needs to breach 60% moderate support in multiple battlegrounds to reach 50% of the total vote and take the White House.

Harris Has a Higher Moderate Support Threshold Than Trump

Moderate support goal thresholds for each candidate to win 50% of the total vote in every battleground state.

	Harris	Trump
Arizona	62%	40%
Georgia	69%	33%
Michigan	58%	44%
Nevada	58%	45%
North Carolina	67%	34%
Pennsylvania	59%	43%
Wisconsin	65%	36%

Source: Analysis of 2020 AP Votecast Data.



However, it should be noted that Harris does *not* need to reach these goal percentages in order to pull out victory in all seven battlegrounds. If Harris hits Biden's moderate support levels, then she has a viable path to victory in six of the seven battleground states, sparing North Carolina where she will need to surpass Biden.

In fact, Harris can get away with marginally underperforming Biden in a couple of select battleground states—but this is not a large margin for error. Biden reached over 50% of the vote in Michigan and Nevada, which is why Harris can still win with lower levels of moderate support, assuming her support with liberals and conservatives remains the same as Biden's in 2020. However, because Biden garnered just over 49% of the vote in Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, our calculations show that Harris will need more of the moderate vote to guarantee she breaches 50% and wins each state.

Meanwhile, to defiantly beat Trump in North Carolina and surpass Biden's 48% of the vote (and 62% support with moderate voters), Harris will need 67% of the moderate vote in that state—nearly as much as Biden garnered in Georgia in 2020. It's a tall order, but it appears that the Harris campaign has momentum carrying them in the Tar Heel state.

Conclusion

If the 2024 electorate looks anything like what it did in 2020, then the math is simple—Vice President Harris needs a supermajority of moderate voters to win the White House. Given the asymmetry of our electoral coalitions and the distinct ideological advantage that Trump has with conservative voters in the battleground states, the burden is significantly greater for Harris to build a winning coalition. Given where she currently stands in the polls, Harris and her campaign have an opportunity to build a broad ideological coalition with moderate and conservative voters alike backing Harris at 2020 levels. Falling short on this task would likely result in a Trump victory.

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