

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 2024

UNCORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

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MCMANUS: Good morning from Washington, where we are coming up off the week of a memorable and lively Democratic Convention in Chicago. For this one-hour webinar from the Governance Studies program at Brookings, telling us what we learned, what the results were, and where the campaign will go from here. We have not one, but three senior fellows from Brookings. Elaine Kamarck, the founding director of the Center for Effective Policy Management, and perhaps more importantly, by now, the grande dame of Democratic conventions. Elaine attended her 10th convention last week for the Democratic Convention. Not only as a scholar, but as a delegate and a member of the party rules committee. Who, role she has had for for some years. E.J. Dionne of the Washington Post, who holds the Averell Harriman chair at the Brookings Institution and was also in Chicago, and Gabriel Sanchez, a senior fellow in Governance Studies, also the Robert Wood Johnson chair in health policy at the University of New Mexico, and important for our discussion, a principal at BSP Research, which does, polling, on on politics and ethnicity and all sorts of issues. So let me, start us off and directed initially to Elaine, with a very preliminary question. What's your political convention for beyond holding, a ceremonial nomination? Occasionally, but not this time. Actually making decisions and grabbing four evenings of free media attention. What what purposes does it serve? And how did this one do?

DIONNE: Elaine you're muted.

MCMANUS: And while Elaine unmutes. Let me remind our our viewers that you can, you can send questions in on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, and you will find the address for that. Somewhere in the material you've already received.

KAMARCK: Okay. Now that I've remembered to unmute, it's amazing how long we are into this, process of of speaking, and we still forget to unmute. Political conventions are in most importantly, they are the legal authority for deciding a nominee for a political party. It is not the it is not, in fact, the primaries. It is the conventions. And most of the time we don't see that distinction, because the winner of the primaries goes into convention with the most delegates and that's it. When it when we have had conventions and the the nominee is a foregone conclusion, there's a past, a present and a future to a convention. So one of the things that happened that you saw at the Democratic convention was to past presidents and kind of by proxy, three because Jason, the the grandson of President Carter was was there doing a very nice homage to President Carter. So you sort of had a look back at the Democratic Party, interestingly enough. And it's a it's a little commentary on the Republican Party today. George Bush wasn't there, okay. Their past president

was not in attendance. In fact, they barely paid attention to their past. There were no homages to Reagan, to Eisenhower, to all the great Republican presidents. They seemed to kind of cut themselves off from their past, which the Democrats did not do. The present, which we'll talk about, I'm sure, extensively here, so I won't dwell on it, is, of course, the nominee and the vice-presidential nominee of the moment, and that the convention sort of leads up to that in with the Wednesday night speeches, always the vice presidential speech and introduction. The Thursday night speech is always the acceptance speech, and that's the climax of the convention. But then what most people do not see, or you get little glimpses of on TV, is how much the conventions are about the future. Now, what stands out is in 2004, this unknown Senate candidate, the skinny black kid from Chicago, okay, came to Boston and electrified the convention. And that was Barack Obama. And so, so is think of it in movie terms. A star is born. And so a lot of people at conventions are looking for the stars. There is the tradition of the, morning breakfast for delegations. In the old days, the morning breakfast was where the candidates for president actually used to come in and campaign. These days, the morning breakfasts are really try outs. Okay, so people like Wes Moore were making the rounds of the morning breakfasts and, you know, sort of showing themselves off. All right, so here's this guy. How is he? And this is all about the future. And that is I think the the what people don't really get from these conventions is there's also a lot of speculation and information about the future of the party that's going on.

MCMANUS: How do we measure success Elaine? Was this a successful convention?

KAMARCK: It certainly felt that way in the hall. It certainly was successful. Now, a little bit of that has to be seen against the, really desperate feeling Democrats had going into this convention with Biden. Okay. They really thought, oh my God, we're stuck, we're going to lose, etc.. Well, they weren't stuck. You know, delegates were not bound. Biden didn't have to release delegates or anything like that. It was a convention that, as soon as Biden got out and as soon as he endorsed Kamala Harris, the state delegations and and this is important because a lot of the press is like, say, Nancy Pelosi did this. Well, she has one vote. I have one vote. Barack Obama had one vote. Bill Clinton had one vote. Where were the votes? The votes were in the state delegations. So within 24 hours of Biden getting out, the Tennessee Democratic Party got together and they pulled their delegation. And guess what? It was for Kamala Harris. And then like, like it was it was like a, you know, just a rush about 20 other Democratic delegations got together because these days, of course, we can get together on a on a zoom call. And the Maryland delegation, which my husband was a member of, they got together and they voted unanimously to endorse Harris. I'm a member of the Virginia delegation. We we got a we got a form which we filled out saying, I intend to vote for Harris or I intend to vote

for someone else because there was no one else. And so what happened was the delegates themselves, they didn't wait to get to Chicago to make their preferences known. They were making their preferences known in these state delegation meetings. And as you will see, within 72 hours, okay, she you could answer the Associated Press, which has been a delegate counter for many years. Within 72 hours, AP could say she's got the votes. And that helped make this a very unified, very exciting convention. And everyone felt it. But remember, it was the delegates making these decisions. Okay. It wasn't some cabal of House members and House leaders and former presidents, etc. it was the actual delegates who had been elected in their, in their congressional districts.

MCMANUS Okay, let me let me turn to you, a predictable way. The media and many voters, are going to try and measure the success of this convention. Is did Vice President Harris get a bounce out of it? Did her numbers rise? In the polls? And we've already got, some, some questions from the audience, including from, Patrick Soper in Milpitas, California. You know, is this how long is this honeymoon? If we can measure a honeymoon likely to last. So you're the pollster on this panel. Tell us what we know so far and what we can expect to see.

SANCHEZ: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Doyle, for the great questions. It's excellent to be joining everybody on this rock star panel. So let me let me jump into it. Yeah, I'm a pollster, so I'll, I'll try not to, boggle us down too much on the specific numbers, but give you a sense of what things look like now. And, you know, one of the most, I think, important opportunities with the stage this large is to broaden your party's tenor, potential voters, in addition to the obvious of rallying your base. Now, the contrast was pretty clear to me. I think the RNC seemed to be really internally focused on the base of Trump voters. Well, the DNC definitely had a field and plenty of examples of Harris, others trying to reach out to moderate Republicans and independents. In fact, I believe Vice President Harris directly stated that she would be the president for all Americans, not just those who support her multiple times. So that was a theme, I think that was reflected, in the overall democratic approach to this. And the polling data does suggest that this happened for Democrats. I would say this was, an indicator of success as a small but meaningful percentage of 2020. Trump voters are moving towards Harris following the convention and a growing share of independents. So obviously time will tell if this convention bump will hold down the stretch of the election. But I think it's a great trend for Harris to build on now. How long will this bump manifest itself? It's hard to say, right? There's a lot of noise in the political environment. I mean, so much has happened in the last month and a half that it seems sometimes that new events, even as big as a convention, don't stick with voters as much these days, because it seems

like there's another major political event within a matter of a week attitude shift, etc.. But I think one of the main things that we want to pay attention to, as we'll get into later in the discussion, I'm sure, one of the things that was not and strong for us in this convention was a lot of specifics on policies, right? Details. How are things going to get paid for all of those really important details? Strategically, we're not part of the convention on the Democratic side. I'll speak to this later. I think that was an important strategic decision that worked well for Democrats. But I think how long this blog last will really be about when voters say, okay, awesome, I'm with you. I've got the energy, I've got the enthusiasm. But I want to hear more about your economic policies and how well that goes. I think it will speak to whether or not the good positive numbers in the polling data for Harris and Democrats maintain themselves for a longer period of time, or whether or not we'll see that that significant increase that we're seeing now, whether that will come back down to life a little bit and make this a little bit more of a competitive race down the stretch.

MCMANUS: We will get back to that question in a few minutes, as we kind of shift to where this campaign goes from here. But first, E.J., let me ask you to to stay with last week and and the convention. To what extent is a convention about defining the candidate, introducing the candidate, framing the question of the campaign, setting out the party's themes. And how did the Democrats do on those scores?

DIONNE: Well, you know, I've been to a lot of. First of all, thank you, Doyle, for doing this. And it's great to be with my colleagues. I've been to, believe it or not, to 12 Democratic conventions and eight Republican conventions. And I've never seen one quite like this. And I think sort of if you want to think it's structural political science terms, this is the first convention since the beginning of the primaries, after the reforms of the early 1970s, in which the party, not the voters, directly chose the candidate because obviously Biden was out of post. He got 14 million votes in those primaries. All these delegates were elected, with the exception of maybe a handful, as Biden delegates, when Biden dropped out, there was no mechanism to go back to the people. So this was the party itself deciding that the best move for the party to win the election was to move to Kamala Harris, and that you obviously was in the leadership of the party. But as Elaine pointed out, it went all the way down. And I think a lot of that there was a lot of talk if Biden dropped out of some competitive process where all these candidates would get together and debate, and I sense even before Biden dropped out, a very strong sentiment among elected Democratic officials, we don't have time for that. That, Kamala Harris is the obvious, alternative. If Kamala Harris is rejected, there would be hell to pay in the party. There would be enormous controversy. But probably more to the point, Kamala Harris could inherit legally the entire Biden campaign without any ambiguity, because it was the Biden-Harris campaign. And, she could

begin the job that Democrats had after Biden dropped out of trying to make the case again for electing a Democrat and defeating Trump, Democrats went through this horrible month, where it was all about, do you push Joe Biden now? Did you ask him to get out? And so they needed to hit the ground running to start making their case. And Harris did it, where there's still no one who looked at her 2020 campaign would expect. But those who looked at her campaigns in California did expect, which she did have real scale. And, a friend of mine said during the convention, you, you can't rise to the occasion unless you have an occasion. And suddenly she had the occasion. She really did it. And so the thing that struck me on the floor of that convention is everybody talked about joy. There really was the joy that happens when you have a near-death experience and then go through resurrection. And a friend of mine added to that. When I mentioned it. Yes. And it was resurrection with an immaculate conception. Friend wasn't a Christian, so I really respected that that metaphor, where, you had a process that moved the party very, very quickly. And I sense on that floor, you know, people talk about message discipline. When you started hearing those chants, you figure it on somebody is there like, the live, live TV shows with a card saying Applause. A card. Thank you, Joe. Most of those chairs. I sat with the Arizona delegation for a couple of hours. A lot of those chairs were spontaneous. The delegates knew it. When it was time to yell USA, USA. And when it was time to yell, don't go back. And, I have never seen a convention like this. And I think some of it is even Obama's convention in oh eight, or Hillary's convention in 2016, which were in many ways real celebrations, came off very tough primaries. There was no tough primary here. This was a party coming together very quickly, saying she is our candidate. And when you think about the polling, just one last point I want to make. There was, oh, there were always a whole lot of voters who wanted to vote against Donald Trump. But Biden's age was a barrier to them, and they weren't getting there. And Harris, both by simply being the new candidate, new and improved, is sort of the theme of this convention, but simply by being the new candidate, but then also by being very effective in this first month game for gateway for all those folks to move over and do what they had sort of wanted to do, which is to vote against Donald Trump. There's not a clear majority yet, but what you've done is to restore the the sort of basic Democratic, pro-democratic vote that is partly against Trump. And you've also finally created enthusiasm. The the number that really hit me in one poll is that among 18 to 30s, who were supporting the Democratic candidate, between Biden and Harris when you made the switch, the the level of enthusiasm went up 19 points, 19 percentage points more said they were enthusiastic about voting for Harris. So we got a whole campaign to go. Something can go wrong. But this is one of the most remarkable transitions in a campaign I think any of us has ever seen.

MCMANUS: E.J. touched on polls came I want to because of your polling expertise. I want to go quickly back to you on, on on one point before, President Biden dropped out of the race, we did see numbers that were unusual. He appeared to be losing support among key parts of the Democratic coalition. Latino voters, Black voters, young voters. What have you seen in the polls? Not since. Not just since the convention, but but since since the president dropped out a month ago.

SANCHEZ: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, this is a key question, Doyle, given that Democrats have been worried, I mean, to the point of pulling their hair out, right? As the last month, as things were not looking very positive, because all of the data suggested that there were weak spots among the coalition for Biden including, as as E.J. noted, low enthusiasm among young voters, Latino voters, the gap between Trump and, Biden in terms of all of the coalition black voters, Latino voters, Asian voters, everything was trending in the wrong direction. So immediately when we saw a shift at the top of the ticket, those numbers started to improve. But they just accelerated after a really strong performance. Right? That was, I think, as E.J. noted, that was what everybody was hoping for. Okay, great. We've got a new candidate. How will she do? Will, she seize the moment and all of us are noting, she clearly did. And the Democrats did overall in a very successful, overall effort. So I think that's all trending in the right direction. Now, clearly, this was a strategic focus for Democrats during the convention. I think their effort, for example, to have the Obama speak in prime time spots and use some of the same messaging around hope, optimism for the future. All of this, I think, helped bridge back to that era where the coalition of young voters and diverse voters was obviously key for Democratic success. Of course, the Obamas gave outstanding performances, which helped, I think, infuse that overall messaging around these underlying values. Joy, optimism. Right. Translating it to that kind of notion of remember that time, remember how great it was. I think all of that worked very, very well. And probably most important to me is whether the convention generates energy, enthusiasm that really helps project to the wider population, who may not have tuned in to watch this on live or on television. And it really sends a message, I think, to some of the coalition as to whether or not the candidate and the party have the momentum to win in November. And on this dimension, again, I think this was a big win for Democrats, and the energy appeared to really translate to this extremely well. I mean, you could feel it through the television set. So I think all of this as well and positive for Harris. Now, what does this mean in terms of polling data? Right. When we think about moving back to the Obama era, I think the main thing that I would stress is it felt like for Democrats, this move from a campaign to a movement. And I think that movement is the energy and enthusiasm and a really underlying desire to try to win, not just in terms of defeating the opposition, but thinking about what this means for actually translating to success and projected to the actual kind of. So polling suggests that with VP

Harris on the ticket, this coalition is slowly but surely coming home. Not only have the horse race numbers improved for Democrats among black, Latino, young voters, Asian American voters, you name it, right? Things are moving in the right direction that Democrats need to see, and enthusiasm is clearly up. As E.J. noted, some of these are eye popping numbers, enthusiasm jumping from like 10 to 25% among some of these subgroups. That's very real. And it's sound in the data and consistent. But I think in closing, one of the key indicators in the data, to me, maybe the most important is that there's been a marked shift among Democratic leaning voters and their underlying attitudes of why they are turning out. And that shift moved from preventing Trump from winning. Right. Which has basically been a bright spot for those of us looking at data on the Democratic side from, of true and clear in the data support and genuine enthusiasm for Harris as a candidate. And I think that shift is important and ensures that the coalition will be there for Harris if she is able to maintain this energy. Following again the transition in conversation from broad themes and underlying values to details about policy. If she's able to make that transition, I think things are going very, very well for Democrats. They've got to be looking at this very excitedly as they start the data.

DIONNE: Can I have a footnote to what Gabe said, I think obviously everything you said is right. I talked to a lot of politicians. Obviously, when I was there, Gabe Amo came a young congresswoman from, Rhode Island, which had gone down to North Carolina to campaign. And he said, you know, this is right after the Harris switch. And he said, you know, there were apologizing to me. We only got 20 people signing up for this event. Then he said he showed up at 120 people showed up. And he said along the way, if they said ten people were coming, 50 people were coming, he said. It was just remarkable to him. Maybe he was very sweet about it. He said, you know, they didn't particularly want to see a congressman from Rhode Island. But when Harris went on the ticket, there was a, you know, there was this surge that no one expected in. And North Carolina. That's significant because that's a state that Democrats would love to pull into play. And I think that's the other thing about the Harris candidacy is she does appear to have broadened the map where she is now competitive, not only in the big three blue wall states Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, but also across, you know, the Sunbelt states. Nevada, Arizona, Georgia and maybe North Carolina. And having that broader map makes you, you difference in giving you multiple paths to winning the election.

MCMANUS: Let's shift gears to to Ta message and policy. But before we do that, let me remind our audience that you can send questions, by X the former Twitter to at Brookings gov. And you can include the #DNC takeaways. And please include your email address when you do that. And we will be glad to handle your to to tackle your questions a little later. Ellen, I want to ask about, about policy and ideology. Not the not

so much the nitty gritty of policy, but what was the the, the larger, message of this convention and its nominee about what Democrats are offering, what being a Democrat means in 2024? Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the congresswoman from the Bronx, tweeted at one point that, we were seeing an alarming trend of Democrats in array. There were that did not seem to be the the traditional, hand to hand fighting over, over, over particular issues. Is that true? Has the party achieved a post Biden synthesis? And if so, what does it look like?

KAMARCK: Absolutely it has. And here's what it is around. A somebody asked me a couple weeks ago, can you summarize Kamala Harris's message in one sentence? And I said, no, I can't. I can summarize it in one word. And the word is freedom. And you noted there were placards up saying freedom. There was a whole series of speeches that went back to the question of not just joy, but freedom. What is behind that? The Dobbs decision. Okay, what's behind that is the unprecedented decision of the Supreme Court to take away a half century old right from the population which happened, and the population that cares about it most happens to be 55% of the electorate. So the underlying thing here was abortion, guys, and it has been there ever since Dobbs. We've seen it. It's explains why even though Joe Biden was in was having terrible numbers and and terrible poll numbers, Democrats kept winning elections unexpectedly. And people say, oh my God, look at that. The Democrats, they won. It was all about choice and freedom. What what the abortion decision did is, is it was way, way beyond abortion. It was about fundamental freedoms. Can the government come into your bedroom or into your home and make decisions for you or into your doctor's office? That's scary. Okay, is particularly scary to a country, to an electorate that was built on freedom. So here we had a situation where the Democrats took away from the Republicans an issue that used to work for them. They used to talk about freedom in, but mostly in economic terms. They used to talk about freedom of regulate from regulation, from government interference in business, etc., which was all well and good. There's a good, good case for that, obviously, but here it went much bigger, much, much bigger. And I think you will see that theme of freedom emerge. And I think it's a winning, winning theme.

MCMANUS: E.J., you're a student of Democratic Party history, and Democrats are, a group who love to argue about these things. They love to get into fights. How long can this, unaccustomed array last? And are there are there hidden fissures in the party that that could affect the campaign?

DIONNE: How many days are there till the election? I think it can last till the day after the election, for sure. But I also think, there will be differences in the party and. Look, you had Sean Fain giving the most class

oriented speech I have ever heard at a Democratic convention. AOC gave a great speech along those lines as well. Then you had tension. Also a former CEO of Amex. Also on the screen you had Adam Kinzinger, Republican, up there. So this is a broad coalition. She is trying to build the glue, obviously, is Donald Trump and the fear everybody agrees, whatever their, orientation is, that preventing Trump from being president is a, moral imperative that, that is the view, of all the people supporting Harris. But I think it's really interesting that you are building a kind of, sort of framework of consensus, even though there will be disagreements on particulars. Elaine is right about freedom, and I agree with what Elaine said. I'd add to that that they are also talking not only about negative freedom, freedom from the state interfering with you, but positive freedom or positive liberty, where the state government can empower people to achieve things they couldn't achieve without some extra help. And that's where the other two words come in that I think define this convention, which are freedom, patriotism, and opportunity. And I can think of a lot of Republicans circa 1980 who would be jealous of, at the Harris Convention for putting those themes and really grabbing them back. And again, it's opportunity, defined as, yes, you can do, anything you want in this country, but some people, start out at an unfair advantage or some people fall on hard times. You know, Tim Walz talked about the need of, survivors benefits to get through. I'm somebody who had survivor's benefits. Helped me out when I was a kid after my dad died. There's. There are ways in which government can make opportunity, more real for people and then patriotism. They are offering a very specific definition of patriotism, which is, yes, love of country, but it's love of this country because it is a pluralist democracy that welcomes in all kinds of people. And we figure out with a lot of fighting and a lot of other stuff, but we figure out how to get along, together. And that message came through over and over, and I think there was something bracing. And they even used at one point, what had been a Republican anthem. I'm proud to be an American, Lee Greenwood's, song, and to watch Democrats shouting USA, USA as if we were at the Olympics was really extraordinary. And I think they are saying we are the mainstream and they are, to use Tim Walz's words, they Vance and Trump. Weird. And this was a real, assertion on who is, quote, normal and who is, quote, weird.

SANCHEZ: Yeah, yeah. And I'll pick up from there if I will E.J. trying to find any spots that my colleagues haven't already covered, because I think they nailed this, this item. But the one thing we really haven't talked about is, is, in my opinion, the decision on the vice presidential nominee was a big question mark. Right? It was another one of these, you know, hey, how was that going to translate? How was he going to do, etc.. And I think what it helped do was really stress. The other theme that I saw consistent across the convention, which was framing their ticket as having middle class roots and values. And I think, this theme was really reinforced by the choice to have Walz join the ticket to me. I think it solidified a strategy to try to win back

some middle class voters who the data again showed were drifting towards Trump when Biden was at the top of the ticket. And even on this theme around freedom that I think you find is spot on with. I mean, if you think about one of the things that went viral was when Walz was making this kind of argument in his speech and saying, look, government intervention, Republicans want this and that to happen. And his line was, you know, where I come from, we have a saying for that. It's called mind your damn business. And I think it was that straightforward Midwestern approach, right, that at that point, I think all of us said, all right, that was a sound decision, and this is going to work for Democrats. And I think maybe the best example in my view. And again, I'm always looking for these things that go viral and maybe have traction, that stick with people that had very limited attention to what actually was going on in the convention. And I think the best example of this underlying theme of where the party for the middle class was the reference that you heard oftentimes of both candidates on the ticket, president and vice president having worked at McDonald's during their student life earlier in their life. And I think this was, again, something that went viral. You saw memes about this, people talking about it. And part of this is a symbolic right. You think about McDonald's. Oh that's cute. But consider this. McDonald's own data suggests that 1 in 8 Americans themselves have worked at McDonald's in their life. So you think that's quite 13, 14% of the overall country? That's a that's a voting bloc, right? That hasn't been tapped in that way. And I think the spillover effect of those of us that maybe didn't work at McDonald's, I had groceries at Albertsons. People have some connection to that type of lifestyle. And I think it was a major theme and a takeaway that hopefully, you know, again, works for Democrats in this broad notion of underlying themes that I think was something that we haven't touched on yet.

KAMARCK: You know, and let me just add let me just add to that, Gabrielle. Also, this is the first ticket a long time. There's no Ivy League history. That ticket has any association with Ivy League. They have much more the college background, much more like most of America as opposed to Ivy League. And Yale really took it on the chin.

DIONNE: The other ticket has two Ivy leaguers on it. Yeah. So, it is such a great I the the moment when they brought out first of all the signs on the floor all said coach Walz. Yes that's all thousands of signs and they brought out that football team and you're a Sunday Night Football fans out there. You almost expected Chris Collingsworth and Mike Tirico to come out and and moderate the discussion. It was such a it was part of this broad middle class messaging, but that in that piece of data on who has worked at McDonald's is really fantastic. I think it needs to be a new variable in all polling to see how the former McDonald's workers, as well as it, is going.

SANCHEZ: I'll put that in one of our next poll. That's a good one.

DIONNE: I really want to see that.

MCMANUS: You better broaden it to make it all fast food, make it a bigger.

DIONNE: Yeah, that was a counter man. I never worked at McDonald's. I was in a very greasy spoon.

MCMANUS: Let let me let me remind our audience. You can also send us questions by email. And the address for that is events@brookings.edu. We don't have an official Republican on this panel, so let me channel what I thought was one of the most interesting Republican critiques we saw last week. And it came from the estimable Peggy Noonan of The Wall Street Journal. And it was this here's what Peggy wrote. Harris is real weak. Point is policy. She will be perceived by many voters as further to the left than they want to go. One of the reasons Democrats had such unity is that the progressives won a struggle in the party. That's where the rising power in the party is. And Miss Harris is, and from that rising power. Does Peggy Noonan have a point? Is, is the Harris ticket's vulnerability, the one that, Mr. Trump is already planning on calling them a bunch of dangerous leftist radicals.

KAMARCK: Let me let me take that on to begin with. I think that what needs to be seen here is the, the full context that there has been somewhat of a shift, to the left of the Democratic Party, certainly since the era when Bill Galston and I were hammering the Democratic Party to to not be too far to the left because they kept losing elections. But that's because the whole country has gone there. So, for instance, I can remember so clearly the 1992 Clinton campaign, he gave one event on, gay rights, and it was carefully timed to be at 11:30 at night because back then there was no internet stuff. And so we, had to wait for filing deadlines for papers, etc., and it essentially went unnoticed. And that's that's not at all the case today. The other thing that's happened in this period of time is that the Republican Party has simply gone off the rails, and that's where I think that's what I think Peggy misses, is that and this is why Vance, by the way, is so unpopular. It turns out that Vance's cat ladies comment not only was offensive in and of itself, but it opened up an entire exploration of this far right wing of the Republican Party that basically believes that women ought to have children. It has. It has feelings of The Handmaid's Tale. You know that Margaret Atwood novel that was such a popular, television show where women's bodies were subjected to the state for the purpose of, of

childbearing? I mean, it's it's creepy stuff. It's just really creepy stuff. And I think that what's really happened is not so much that the Democrats have moved a little bit to the left, but the country has. It's a much more open country. Women's rights are are much more taken for granted. And there's this bunch of Republicans out there. Wanting to take us back. Which is why that slogan from the convention was so important. That refers, make no doubt about it, that refers to abortion, but more largely to women's rights, women's place in society, etc. and, that is incredibly powerful. And that's where they're in trouble. That's really where they're in trouble.

DIONNE: Yeah, I read that, Peggy Noonan piece, Doyle. And what I thought partly was similar to what Elaine said, but also, and Tim Walz has been especially articulate on this. What liberal or left means depends on what you define it. And this convention was saying, if by what if you mean we're not patriotic. Well, that sure isn't true. Then by left, you mean we're not for freedom? Well, that sure isn't true. If left means we don't believe in hard working people working their way up. That's not true. And they were on all of the, tropes that, you know, Republicans have at times in the past, successfully associated with the left. The Democrats are saying that's not it. But since the 1990s, and especially since the economic crash of 2008, a lot of the country has moved not far left, but to a much more critical view of how capitalism works without proper, regulation. And so, you know, what Walt says is on my left because we passed a bill to provide free breakfast for all kids in Minnesota. Is it left to want everybody to have parental leave? Is it left to want to have programs to help people take care of their elderly parents? There was a very good piece in the New York Times by Jan Harris, an economist who's worked in Democratic administrations, and I thought she zeroed in on something really helpful. She said that that that Harris is economics. And on the policy thing, I think there's more there than people are giving her credit for some of it out of the Biden program, that her approach is building balance, that you can use government to build things or help encourage building things. In Harris's case, housing. She promised 3 million more rental or purchase unit housing units. You know, the government can help encourage on the building side and balancing power in the economy, that there is a view that many Americans hold. The majority holds that there's too much economic power concentrated in a few places. And it's a great American tradition to break up concentrated power. And so, yeah, Harris has a few things back there that they've been trying to play on, but she very shrewdly in the 2020 primary. There was a lot of pressure to move left on certain issues. And Harris very quietly said, you know, I wanted to ban fracking then I'm not for that anymore and so on. And they made quite a one of a kind of flip flopping attack. But I've been told those aren't working very well from people who looked at the polling. But I think the left

thing, is something Republicans will use. I just don't think it's as effective as Peggy thinks it will be. But maybe she'll be right and I'll be wrong.

MCMANUS: Gabe. Your thoughts? Yeah.

SANCHEZ: Yeah, I'll add to this briefly with a few points. I mean, one is, you know, clearly that's going to be part of the strategy. Of course it is. Right? I mean, we think back to, when when Harris was on the 2020 ticket. Right? I remember the catchphrase Trump was using. Then they'll probably dust that off with Comrad Kamala trying to flamer is a socialist communist, all of that. So clearly that's in their playbook and they're already running ads and in that regard. But the trade off is right. I mean, one of the weak spots for Biden was progressives not thinking he was left enough. And so you run this danger, if you're Republicans, of pushing that narrative. And guess what it does? It generates enthusiasm among the coalition. Young people get excited. Maybe she is part of the left and she's actually talking about on television. So you want that danger of potentially infusing more energy into some of the weak spots among Democrats that Biden was facing. So there's a little bit of a trade off there, depending on how you utilize that strategy. But I think one, if I will area that I haven't talked about that maybe exemplifies a little bit of the tightrope that I think Democrats have to walk is immigration. I can't go through this, this panel without talking a little bit about immigration policy. And, you know, long story short, is, I think, similar to the economy, the focus on broader themes in the immigration space that are really popular among the base of voters that Democrats utilize in the convention worked very well for Harris, and I think it gave us a glimpse of how she will try to deflect the tidal wave. You know, you're going to see so many negative ads from from the Trump campaign trying to run against her on this issue, framing her as soft. Right. Which is another way of saying progressive. Right. So I think what we saw is, you know, she knows this is a weak spot for her. You know, she's going to be called the immigration czar, etc., etc.. So I think it needed to be part of the overall agenda of, thinking about the convention. And I think Harris did pretty well in her speech. In short, what she tried to do is, in essence, try to frame immigration and a little bit of a different approach than we've seen throughout prior, conventions from Democrats. You know, we used to see, for example, a really heavy focus on path to citizenship. A ship pushing back on Trump's policies. In fact, you used to see a lot of actual stories from immigrants themselves and their families. During Democratic conventions, you didn't see any of that this time around. And the ship was subtle. But for those of us that track immigration was powerful. This time around was a focus first on border security, first signaling. I'm strong on this issue. I fought against cartels projecting strength right? The opposite of of weakness and being too progressive on the issue. And I think when we translate this moving forward, I anticipate that she's

going to approach immigration with a very balanced border enforcement, and a path to citizenship will be the theme that she tries to frame this on whether or not that will be effective and will win. Time will tell, but I think it's going to be that approach across a number of other domestic policy issue areas projecting I'm not weak, I'm not soft, I'm not overly progressive to combat that. It's going to come from the Republicans. And the thing that she has going for is I don't think she needs to be as vocal and scream for progressive values, because at the end of the day, a lot of progressives say, well, she was one of us to begin with. She comes from that arm of the Democratic Party. I think that gives her a little bit of tactical advantage of maybe downplaying that. And I think a lot of progressives will understand that strategy. But she's really on our side.

MCMANUS: Gabe, I'm glad you're here to that issue. I wanted to ask both Elaine and E.J. what other challenges Harris faces now.

DIONNE: Right Elaine.

KAMARCK: I think one of the most important. And this faces any woman running for president is she's got the commander in chief challenge. And I thought I was surprised, pleasantly surprised at just how strong her words and her her tone were when she got to foreign policy. She obviously stood by a muscular US presence in the world. She had great respect for the military. She understood the stakes in Ukraine. She she brilliantly balanced our interests in the Middle East and Gaza and the suffering in Palestine versus the need for continued support and security for Israel. I thought that was pitch perfect, and it was delivered in a way that said, oh, yeah, she can be commander in chief, you know. Yeah, she's a woman she didn't serve, but she could be commander in chief. And of course, one of the reasons I'm sure she picked Tim Walz to be on that ticket is because he did have deep military service. I mean, it was National Guard. He wasn't in combat. That's true. But the fact is that there's somebody on that ticket who would actually worn a uniform and that that was, I think, very important. And of course, you notice that, by the way, Trump did the same thing. So I think she, she, she, she hit that absolutely. Correctly.

MCMANUS: E.J.

DIONNE: Just two things Trump gives sort some openings both on that. I agree with what Elaine said. And in what? In terms of Trump's foreign policy makes it easier for her to look tough. And it's always something that, you know, women candidates or, you know, it's unfair. Look at Margaret Thatcher, for

goodness sake. But it's our goal to my ear. But it's a reality. You know, Trump gives her a real opening, by his attitude toward and Bill Clinton pointed this out, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong UN and his whole approach, to foreign affairs are also by those vile comments he's made about veterans. And so and she sees those very effectively. I want to take a back just briefly on immigration. The other opening Trump gives her, is that, he told Congress to reject a very, very tough border bill negotiated with one of the most conservative Republicans in the Senate. There was a test of that. Tom Suozzi, the congressman from Long Island, won a special election attacking Trump. And the Republicans were killing that strong border bill. Democrats are very worried about losing that special election. And he won going away. And I think that's his kind of typical suburban district. There are a lot of them, like a lot like at around the country that she can just hang that back on. Trump. And I think that's effective. I think the main thing is, the Republicans are going to try to tell some story about Kamala Harris turning her into some kind of California leftist, distant from, the experience of the rest of America. I love the fact that she mentioned, not that she was born in San Francisco, but she was from Oakland. We remember the mess that, the, attacks on San Francisco Democrats. They're going to try all that. They lost a month. And I'm curious what Gabe thinks about this, that I expected them to be more effective early on in trying to define who Kamala Harris is, because even though she's vice president or maybe because she's vice president, Americans don't pay much attention to who is vice president. They have an opening to define her early. They gave her a month, more than a month to define herself. And I think their job is a little harder now than it would have been if they had had a coherent strategy coming out of the box. I'm curious, Gabe, do you have a thought on that?

SANCHEZ: Yeah, it's a great question, E.J. I mean, there's always two ways to look at this, right? One is, and I agree with you, they they didn't seize on that early on. And I don't know if that was strategic. Obviously things are moving at work speed when you're trying to transition who's on the top of the ticket and everything as quickly as they had to do. But one of the upsides to that, and I think it follows suit also, not just in terms of how she would define herself, how she would be framed, etc., but also not really having her speak to any details of policies, especially early on, even through the convention. That to me is the biggest weak spot. But what it did is it prevented Republicans, including former President Trump, from being able to seize on that. In essence, just like you didn't lay out all of your playbook on how we're going to define who she is, what her policy agenda is early, because it really prevented the opposition from being able to dig in on that attack, that as aggressively as they might have wanted to otherwise. And I think as the kind of framing through the convention took place, one of the key nuances that I think speaks to some of the tactical advantage she has on immigration. When you come from an immigrant background in your family, it takes some of that context

of immigration and a much different tone. Yeah, and it would be otherwise. And I think unveiling that, you know, at a convention where you've got all those numbers played out really well. And I mean, one thing we really didn't speak to at the top, you know, how do we measure success, how many eyeballs paid attention to this? And I forget the exact numbers we were talking about beforehand. But the important point is they beat the RNC, right? In terms of overall viewership. The one that I know Trump takes a close attention to is primetime. My speech versus hers. Harris won on that dimension as well. And I mean, these are symbolic things. But what it does is we all know that Trump cares so deeply about TV ratings, crowd size. And when you seize that opportunity and you say, look, we beat you on your own in your own game, so to speak, and we're able to frame our candidate in a way of who she is, especially around this context of immigration. In some ways, whether it was tactical or not, I think it worked for Democrats that they waited until you had all these big numbers, the big attention from the American audience to frame who she is and what her agenda is and that audience.

MCMANUS: We have several questions from the audience asking, so when are we going to get the details of Kamala Harris's economic policy? These aren't pundits. These are actual, actual viewers asking this question. So it's not just people like me. That she has. She? It was striking in her acceptance speech how much space she gave to foreign policy. And I think those who watched that speech have a pretty good idea of her foreign policy grounding. Has she done enough to fill in the details on economic policy, and is that likely to pose a challenge?

KAMARCK: Let me let me call people's attention to the fact that there is a Democratic Party platform. It is quite long. It is fairly detailed and there is no way that that platform would have been written. I have written several Democratic Party platforms over the years. There's no way that would have been written without the approval of President Biden and Vice President Harris. And there's certainly no way that that would have been passed at the convention as it was on, Monday night. No way it would have been passed if Harris objected to anything in there. So if you're looking for details, start with the Democratic Party platform. It's a pretty good guide. It has always been a pretty good guide. It's sort of fashionable to say, oh, platforms other than frankly, they always are pretty good guides as to what a candidate is going to do. I think there's a couple new things she laid out, which she'll have to provide some detail to, but remember, she is running for Joe Biden's second term. Okay. And this and it was an on policy. It was a very popular second term okay. That everything they did was very popular in the second term, just as George Bush ran on Ronald Reagan's third term. Okay. And then just, she is running on the second term. The reason that's important is because having

firsthand experience of having worked for a vice president is when you're vice president, you are in an impossible position when it comes to policy. If you don't agree with the policy of your president, people think you're kind of a, yeah, kind of a bad person. Like, what a disloyal jerk you are, right? Or they say, well, wait a minute. If you disagreed with that, how come you didn't speak up when you were in the Oval Office in the privacy? So you cannot disagree with the policy of your president. Okay. You have to take that policy and bring it forward. And I think that's what most of her, most of her policy has been doing. So if you look at the Democratic platform, if you look at where Joe Biden has been, if you look at what Joe Biden says about unfinished work, you'll get a pretty good idea of her policy details. So this is not she. She isn't. She didn't come out of nowhere. Okay. And by the way, one of the reasons that the world, coal, the democratic world coalesced so quickly around her is they knew that they knew what her policies were, because guess what? Her policies are Joe Biden's policies. She doesn't have any option, any other option. Whereas that was not the case, by the way, for a Gavin Newsom or a Gretchen Whitmer or all the other people being talked about, we didn't really know where where their policy was. So we know a lot about her.

MCMANUS: Although she's not. Yeah go ahead, E.J.

DIONNE: Well, I was going to say, to quote Kamala Harris, mother, she didn't just fall out of a coconut tree.

KAMARCK: Yeah, exactly.

DIONNE: And, you know, it's funny, as Elaine was talking, I put together a list, family leave, expanded family leave, the elder care, childcare. That's all detailed in Biden's program. Expanding health coverage by expanding out Obamacare. A lot of that's been in Biden's program, building up the care economy. Looking at collusion in the food industry, not price controls, by the way, but looking at whether concentration of power leads to higher prices, if incentives to build 3 million more houses, both by government and the private sector, big increase in the child credit. We tried that. It actually, work tax increases on the wealthy corporation to pay for these programs and middle class benefits. And people act as if there's no policy out there. There's a lot of policy out there that she has proposed. And the issue is how much specificity does a candidate have to offer on this? I'm behind a lot of these is quite a bit of specificity already. These are these policies didn't fall out of a coconut tree either. And so, yeah, I think the more I'm, you know, I'm pro policy, I work at the Brookings Institution. The more she wants to do, the better. But I think that's a real well, I think the country need knows where she would want to go.

MCMANUS: Gabe. You agree?

SANCHEZ: Yeah, I agree with my colleagues on a couple of things I'll point out is, you know, let's let's remind ourselves it was a strategic decision by Democrats not to get into the weeds of policies, especially economic policy, during the convention. They knew they could feel the wind right at their back as a transition to Harris. All the polling numbers are going in the right direction, right? Record numbers of donations. When you got all of that momentum, well before, the last thing you want to do is steer away from that by getting into the weeds of concrete policy discussion. So let's remind ourselves it worked. It was a strategic focus. But as the member of the audience points out, eventually Americans are going to want to hear more details. And I agree with my colleagues. It's all there, right? Not a big shift from Biden's agenda, especially in terms of what is often referred to as the Kerry economy. To me, what the difference is going to be, my biggest critique of the Biden campaign wasn't about the underlying policies. It's how it was communicated and whether or not what's been winning and working for Biden and the successes that have been made on the economy for whatever reason, and was not translating in the messaging to reach the audience that's intended to reach. Right. Whether or not Harris and Walls can really improve on the messaging and the outreach, to me, that's going to be the real story of whether or not they win this election. Let's remind ourselves every single poll, even after the shift in the ticket, is still indicated. Pocketbook issues, inflation, jobs that pay me enough to keep up with inflation. Number one issue for all voters across all subgroups of the electorate. And although the gap is close, when you ask those folks who do you trust better on the economy, Trump is still winning on that issue in terms of all public policies that are reputable that I've seen. So I think they're going to have to move pretty quickly and thinking about not what the underlying policies are. These are all things that are very popular among Democrats. How do you message that those things are going to be effective? I can get those things passed that other Democrats have not been able to get it move through Congress. And how am I going to pay for it? How well they can communicate on those issues to me will be the story of the election.

MCMANUS: And Gabe. As we move into the last three minutes of this discussion, give us a quick reality check on where the polls top line, are these days, that it's tempting to come out of a successful convention with this, kind of an ere of triumphalism. But as I'm looking at the polls, Kamala Harris is now pretty much at parity with Mr. Trump, which does not mean she can count on winning the Electoral College.

SANCHEZ: I think that's right. I mean, you know, there's a lot of noise in polls, obviously. Right. Depending on what day, all these different nuances that if we had more time I would speak to. But you typically get somewhere between two, 3 to 5% if it's a really great convention, a 7% bump. I think we're seeing the reality of that. And it's really made this, you know, a slight advantage towards Democrats, in my opinion, looking deeply at the data. But in the key battleground states, we're still within margin of error in just about every one of those states. So the key, however, is I think E.J. or one of my colleagues, Elaine, possibly at the beginning, framed it, however, that as you start to broaden the map right on the southwestern states now looking great for Harris, the importance of the battleground states remain intact. But the battlefield changes quite a bit. And all of that is moving positively for Harris, according to all of the polls that we've seen so far. So I think when we'll see the next wave is the next, the first debate between these two candidates will give an opportunity for the real focus on policy impact to happen among polls. And I think if Harris maintains where she's at doesn't slip, I think things will be trending very well for them as we move to the homestretch in November.

MCMANUS Here's a kind of a fun question from from Stephen Brecher in Charlottesville, Virginia. What was the most surprising thing to you at this convention? A quick lightning round question. What was what do you came as a kind of wow, surprise?

KAMARCK: My biggest surprise was Democrats didn't do anything crazy. Okay? There was nobody talking about defund the police, okay? Which was one of the worst things that happened in recent electoral cycles. So Democrats didn't do anything crazy.

MCMANUS: E.J.

DIONNE: I think the biggest surprise was the mood of, of elation and the way in which every, as I mentioned the beginning, every delegate, it was as if every delegate was a political consultant. That every delegate you talked to knew what the message of the convention was. Knew what they needed to say. And that's partly because these delegates are very rooted in the politics of their own places. There were people there running for the legislature, were running for, state office. And I never seen a convention as disciplined, as this one with, you know, there was a little static around the Palestinian issue. But, really remarkably, little static. And, that surprised me. And the, just the mood that, you know, the joy word and people make fun of, maybe I can

see why. But I never felt anything quite like this at a convention. I think, Elaine, I do agree on that. And, just before we go.

SANCHEZ: Yeah, I'd say, like, biggest surprise is how smooth this thing all came together. I mean, I don't know how many reporters I spoke to. I'm sure my colleagues very similarly, when there was a shift at the ticket, everybody wanted to know how they pulled this off. There's not enough time before the convention. There's going to be chaos, yada yada. And none of that happened. I mean, from every aspect of the convention, I think this was the best I've ever witnessed. And it came across with no diffusion, no protest dynamic. I think that was incredibly effective. Only other weeks. But you could actually point to no Beyonce, no Taylor Swift. Other than that, there's not a whole lot to critique, which I think was surprising to me, to be honest.

KAMARCK: Can I just say, can I just say, just wait till October for Beyonce and Taylor Swift?

SANCHEZ: That they didn't actually need it, which is also pretty surprising.

KAMARCK: And I think I think they'll be there in the end.

DIONNE: Good rumor to build audience.

MCMANUS: Totally. Elaine, you're an insider. We will take that and insider dope. Okay, I'm sorry to say we are at the end of a very productive and illuminating hour. We could go for another hour. Easy, but we're not going to be able to do it today. I want to thank our audience for, for being attentive and for pitching in with questions. I want to thank, most, most fervently, Elaine K Mark, E.J. Dionne, and Gabriel Sanchez. Thank you all from the Governance Studies program at Brookings. And we hope to see you again. The show.

DIONNE: Thank you so much, Doyle.