

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Does She Have What It Takes?

**An Analysis of Kamala Harris' 2020 Presidential
Campaign**

Author: Mélanie Massoz

Promotor: Pr. Katherine Opello

Academic year: 2021-2022

Master in Multilingual Communication with a professional focus on Languages
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Abstract

This thesis offers an in-depth analysis of Kamala Harris' failure at becoming president in 2020. The framework established to answer this problematic is separated into two parts: the professional life of the candidates willing to become president, and their personal life. Both parts are based on a theoretical background stating that a candidate has more chance of achieving his or her goal if (s)he followed certain paths. These include being a former vice president, a former governor, a former member of the Congress (whether it be a Senator or a Member of the House of Representatives), and/or being a military veteran. Regarding the personal life, it appears that white men who are around 56 years old and who went to college to study law are the most likely to be elected president. Through a comparison to 21st century presidents and qualities that are common to most of them, it appears that Kamala Harris only lacks being a man and being white in terms of her personal life, whereas she had the right professional past compared to the previous presidents. The last part of the analysis concerns the issues that only Kamala Harris had to face, such as her funding issues, comparisons to Biden and Obama, an attack regarding her right to become president, her opponent being Donald Trump, and her lack of clear fighting points. The conclusion of this thesis is that regarding her past and her situation in 2020, she could have become president if she were a white man. Her past professional and personal life do not seem to have played against her. Thus, the problems unique to her were the biggest impediments which prevented her from becoming the first female president.

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Introduction

You may be the first. Don't be the last – Shyamala Gopalan (Harris, 2019)

Wednesday, January 20, 2021 marked a turning point in American history. Not only because Americans elected the oldest president in their history, Joseph Biden Jr, better known as Joe Biden. He is the oldest American president ever since he was 78 years old at the time of his election. But also, 2021 was a turning point because Kamala Harris became the first woman vice president ever in American history. Not only did she accomplish this milestone, but she also became the first Black woman and the first Asian American woman to have been elected vice president in this country. Nevertheless, she was not a candidate for the position of vice president from the beginning. In fact, she wanted to get a higher position in American politics. At first, she wanted to become president in 2020. Unfortunately, her attempts to become the first female American president were not successful and that is why she decided to withdraw from the presidential race in December 2019, before she even was on any ballot. However, she got back on her feet and accepted Joe Biden's offer to become his running mate during the 2020 election, and the following four years if they won the election. Although it was not a foregone conclusion given that their opponents were the notoriously extravagant President Donald Trump and his vice-presidential pick Michael Pence. But despite the odds, the Biden-Harris ticket ended up being the big winner of the 2020 presidential election and thus became the 46th president and 49th vice president of the United States of America respectively.

Looking back on this unusual election, in part due to COVID, it raises the question of Kamala Harris' failure to become president. Could she have become president if she had not withdrawn from the race in 2019? Did she have what it takes to become president in 2020?

Through all of this thinking, the hypothesis for this thesis is negative. We hypothesize that Kamala Harris could not have been elected president in 2020, despite the fact that there were several elements in her favor. In fact, she had the right professional past thanks to her experience as a Senator, even if she had been a Senator only for one year when elected vice president. That year increased her chance of winning. She was also in the right age gap if we look at the median age of presidents when they were elected. What is more, she graduated law school like the majority of candidates who became presidents. Nevertheless, in comparison to 21st century presidents, she did not fulfill the personal criteria that could have helped her. She is not a white man, instead she is an African American and Asian American woman. There

also were some problems particular to her case which decreased her chance of accessing the presidential office. The fact that she did not position herself clearly on political issues was, for example, an impediment. Her diversity of opinions and inability to focus on clearly established battle points, since she targeted many different issues, from police abuse to LGBTQ+ rights, were other problems regarding her campaign. However, contrary to popular opinion, the fact that she is a woman has not been an issue during her political campaign.

The journey to determine whether Kamala Harris had what it took to become president in 2020 is made through three research questions (see below). They focus on the impact of Kamala Harris' professional past on her chances of becoming president, whether or not Harris fitted the traditional presidential profile, and the degree to which she was impeded by problems unique to her candidacy. To answer these questions, not only were research made and papers read, but interviews were also conducted with two people. The first one is Dr. Bruce Altschuler, a former professor at the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego), he taught political science with a focus on presidency. The second interviewee is Mr. Dan Morain, the author of one of the main books used for this thesis: *Kamala's way: An American Journey*, which is a biography of Kamala Harris. Both interviews can be found in the Appendices (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2), and both were recorded with the agreement of the interviewees.

This thesis begins with a recap of the presidential election process and a quick summary of American political parties. The goal here is to get a better picture of what went wrong for Kamala Harris in the context of political institutions and processes. We then move on to a historical overview of the evolution of the presidency with a focus on its importance and role over time. We then move on to assess and analyze the qualities and characteristics of previous successful candidates for the presidency with a focus on the 21st century presidents. This is done in order to establish a framework that we can later apply to Kamala Harris' candidacy. Vice President Harris is the focus in the next section. In fact, it offers a summary of her life. This section is the premise for our subsequent comparison of Kamala Harris to the five 21st century presidents to see which qualities or which characteristics she was lacking in 2020. We continue with a deeper look into the particular problems Kamala Harris was confronted with and which were an impediment to her becoming the first female president of the United States. From there, the three research questions listed below will be answered and their hypotheses evaluated. This thesis concludes with a discussion of the findings and a quick look into the future.

1. Research questions

This thesis seeks to answer the following three research questions:

RQ1: How did Kamala Harris' professional past impact her chance of becoming president in 2020?

RQ2: Did she fit the qualities commonly associated with 21st century presidents?

RQ3: To what extent have issues affecting only Kamala Harris been an impediment to her ascension to the office of president in 2020?

2. Hypotheses

Regarding the first research question, the hypothesis put forward is that her professional life should have been an advantage in her campaign. She, in fact, had a similar path to most of the 21st century presidents in terms of former experience and offices. This comparison is based on statistics and on empirical data.

For the second question, the variables that are taken into account are the race, the gender, the age and the level of education. These variables are quantifiable. The hypothesis regarding the second research question is that she did not have all the qualities that are commonly associated with presidents, especially in the 21st century. The color of her skin is an impediment but still seems less of an issue than her gender as no woman has ever been elected president.

The third question focuses on Kamala Harris and issues unique to her in the 2020 campaign. Funding issues, constant comparisons to former President Barack Obama and current president Joe Biden, facing Trump and her unclear stands prevented her from accessing the presidency in 2020. So, she had her own set of issues that were a hindrance to winning the U.S. presidential election in 2020.

3. Methodology

In order to answer the first research question, I conducted empirical research. The purpose was to find data about the paths taken by former presidents. I expected to find that there were pathways regarding the former offices and experience that a lot of presidents seem to have

taken. Key variables included being a former vice president, a former governor, a former senator, a former Member of the House of Representatives, and/or being a military veteran. All these five variables have been proved to be paths followed by the majority of the presidents who were ever elected. Kamala Harris' professional life is then compared to the above mentioned five variables to see which ones fit her. The purpose is to see to which extent her past experience and her professional life impacted her chance at becoming president in 2020. If she proved to fit most of the most important categories then she should have been able to access the presidency, which would suggest that it was not her past experience that was an impediment to her success.

Regarding the second research question, I compared Harris to other 21st century presidents (i.e., the last four former presidents and the current one). This process is based on four variables which are easily measurable: race, gender, age and the level of education. When it comes to race, it has been argued that more white men have been elected than people of color, thus, one could argue, implying that being white increases the chance of becoming president. For gender, all presidents had been man, so being a woman seems to reduce the possibility to access the presidency. For age, the median age of the presidents when they are elected was 56 years old. Regarding the level of education, most of the presidents graduated college and/or law school. Based on these assumptions, we analyze to what extent does Kamala Harris fit these requirements to become president.

The answer to the third research question is based on two interviews that were conducted (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2), and on various secondary sources. The first interview was conducted with Dr. Bruce Altschuler (Appendix 1), who was a professor at the State University of New York at Oswego (SUNY Oswego). He was teaching political science with a focus on the presidency. He wrote numerous scholarly articles and eight books about political science and popular culture. The second interview was conducted with author Dan Morain (Appendix 2), the author of one of the biographies read, *Kamala's way: An American Life*. He has been journalist for 45 years and covers California politics and some national politics. Both interviews can be found in the Appendices as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. These interviews highlighted that some unique, specific, problems blocked Kamala Harris in her efforts to become president.

Section 1: American Presidential Election¹

In this section, the presidential election process and the different political parties are reviewed. This section is necessary since Kamala Harris went through all of these steps when she tried to become president. It is thus important to understand the process in order to be able to explain where she encountered difficulties.

1. Presidential and Vice-presidential Election

It is commonly acknowledged that American presidential elections are held every four years. The last one was in 2020 with Joe Biden winning the presidency and Kamala Harris winning the vice presidency thereby respectively becoming the 46th president and the 49th vice president of the United States of America. However, unlike other U.S. elections, the president and vice president are elected through a process called the Electoral College, which was established in the Constitution by the Founders. For the remainder of the thesis, it is necessary to dig deeper into how the U.S. presidential election works. Since the vice president is chosen by the president, this section is primarily concerned with the presidential election.

a) American Political Parties

Before going further into the process of American elections, it is important to understand the existing political parties. In the United States, there are two main parties: i.e., the Democrats and the Republicans. The Democrats, the party of Joe Biden, are liberal and left-leaning, while the Republicans, the party of former President Donald Trump, are conservative and right-leaning.

The Democratic Party has been around since the time of America's revolution, leading to the U.S. independence. The party was formed in opposition to the Federalists in 1792. The Republican Party is the younger of the two, having been founded in 1854. It rose thanks to Abraham Lincoln who was the first Republican president in history. The two parties stand on opposite sides of the spectrum when it comes to social ideas, military issues, the LGBTQ+ community, abortion, the death penalty, stance on taxes, etc. in short, almost every decision that needs to be made for a country (Diffen, 2017). This rivalry can cause a lot of problems,

¹ This section is a summary and compilation of what was found in Nick Ragone's *The Everything American Government Book* and on the usa.gov website about American elections.

especially when the president does not belong to the same party as the majority in the House of Representatives or the Senate. In this case, policies can be very difficult to implement because the House of Representatives and the Senate do not share the same ideological views as the president.

Since George H.W. Bush was elected president in 1989, there has been an alternation of Democratic and Republican presidents. For instance, George Bush Sr. was a Republican, his successor Bill Clinton was a Democrat, then George W. Bush was again a Republican. He was followed by Barack Obama who was a Democrat and then Donald Trump who was a Republican. And now Joe Biden is the current president, and he is a Democrat (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). In this context, it is not easy for America to have policies put in place that are going to last over time, because of the change in ideology every four years. If one looks at the Affordable Care Act, better known as Obamacare, for example, it was put in place by Barack Obama in 2010, but Trump wanted to dismantle it, even though he could not do it in the end as he was blocked by the Supreme Court (ConCurrent News, 2020).

b) Requirements

Before one can even think about running for president, one has to meet a few requirements. There are three basic requirements that are established by the United States Constitution to be considered as a presidential candidate. First, the candidate must be a natural born citizen of the United States of America. Second, (s)he must be at least 35 years old. And third, (s)he must have been a U.S. resident for at least 14 years. A candidate who spends or raises more than \$5,000 must also register with the Federal Election Commission, which requires that the purpose of raising, and spending campaign funds be assigned to a primary campaign committee (usa.gov, 2020).

c) The Election Process

I. Primaries and Caucuses²

Because many people want to be president, potential candidates must campaign across the country to try to win their party's nomination. This process is called a primary. Primaries and caucuses are the first step in the election process. Although they are organized differently, primaries and caucuses have the same purpose: to select the major political parties' candidate for the general election. Primaries and caucuses can be open, closed, or hybrid, meaning that people can either vote for a candidate from any party (open), or involve only registered participants from that party (closed), or some variation in between (hybrid).

Primaries, on the one hand, are organized by state and local governments and the votes remain secret. Caucuses, on the other hand, are private meetings organized by political parties. During primaries and caucuses, participants form groups based on who they support the most. They then give speeches to try to convince people that their preferred candidate is the best. In the end, the parties in each state award the candidates a certain number of delegates who will then represent that state at the National Convention. The candidate with the most delegates is the eventual party nominee.

Thus, the candidate who will represent the party in the presidential election is the one who wins the primaries and caucuses. Thus, if we look at the 2020 election, it was Joe Biden who was the winning Democratic candidate and he faced Donald Trump, the Republican candidate. Both the Republican and Democratic candidates choose a running mate, the potential vice president.

² **Super Tuesday:** The date on which the greatest number of states carry on primary voting for the presidential election is called Super Tuesday in the United States. The date is not fixed but depends on when the various states hold their schedule for the primary election. (Corporate Finance, 2020).

Super Tuesday appears in 1980 when three states held primaries on the same day. These states were Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Though it is not the first Super Tuesday recognized. The first one to have ever been recognized happened in 1988. That year, 21 states voted on the same day. (Corporate Finance, 2020).

II. Vice President Selection

The selection of the vice president by the presidential candidate, as we know it today has only existed since 1960. Prior to that, the candidate who came second in the Electoral College vote automatically became vice president. However, this system created problems because it led to situations where the president and vice president were from two different political parties. This happened, for example, in 1796 when Thomas Jefferson, who was a Democratic Republican (the former name for Democrats), was elected vice president under John Adams, a Federalist, because Jefferson ended up being the runner-up. Then, in 1804, the Twelfth Amendment recognized the reality of political parties and declared that voters should cast two votes, one for president and one for vice president.

Today, the presidential candidate chooses his or her running mate, and then the Electoral College votes for the duo, but still votes for both the president and the vice president by filling in two different ballots when voting. Now, the choice of a vice president is considered a decisive decision for the leadership of a presidential candidate, which means that the choice of his or her vice president can help him or her win or ensure his or her downfall. What happened with John McCain is an example where the choice of vice president caused the downfall of the candidate. It is claimed that McCain lost 2.1 million votes due to his choice of Sarah Palin as his running mate in the 2008 election, which is 1.6 percentage points, a huge loss (Brower, 2019: 100).

Presidential candidates choose their vice president based on their resume, the more unique and impressive the better, or based on the assets they can offer to balance the ticket, and thus appeal to different types of voters (NowThis World video, 2016). This is what we see with the Trump-Pence ticket. Trump, who is a very unconventional candidate, chose a religious and conventional vice president as a way to balance his extravagant personality. As explained in Kate Anderson Brower's *First in Line: Presidents, Vice Presidents, and the Pursuit of Power* (2019), Pence was chosen because

[w]hat they needed was someone with “safe hands,” as vetting lawyers call it. Someone who would be calm in a crisis; someone who could instill a sense of confidence in the Republican base that remained deeply skeptical of Trump. Most of all, what they needed was someone who could take over the presidency, if necessary (Brower, 2019: 16).

In short, Trump needed someone to balance so as to win over conservative Republicans. The same thing happened in the 2020 election with Joe Biden's choice of Kamala Harris as his running mate. They are opposites in many ways. For example, she was 56 years old when she

became vice president, that is considered young for such a position while he is considered old since he was elected when he was 78. Also, she is a Black person while he is white (History video, 2020). Presidents also want someone who will not embarrass them (Brower, 2019: 77).

III. National Conventions and General Election

The next steps in the presidential election are the National Convention and the General Election, which take place after the primaries and caucuses. The National Convention is a convention held by the party to select its presidential candidate. This choice is confirmed by a vote of the delegates. The delegates are either bound delegates (also called pledged delegates), which means they are bound to the candidate they were assigned in the primaries and caucuses. Or they are unpledged delegates or superdelegates, which means they can endorse the candidate of their choice. The nominated candidate is the candidate who wins the majority of delegates.

At the National Convention, a party's presidential candidate officially announces his or her choice of vice president. The vice president is formally elected along with the president by the Electoral College. As mentioned earlier, the Twelfth Amendment has required since 1804 that the electors "shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President, and they shall make distinct lists of all persons voted for as President, and of all persons voted for as Vice-President" (Constitution Center). Thus, it is no longer the second-best presidential candidate who becomes vice president, but a candidate who is considered the best fit for the vice president position or a good balance. Generally, the president and vice president are chosen together by the voters.

When no candidate receives a majority, the National Convention is contested. This means that there will be one or more new rounds of voting for delegates until one candidate wins the nomination. This is what happened at the 1924 Democratic National Convention. This contested National Convention is the most famous and longest running. West Virginia Congressman John W. Davis, New York Governor Alfred E. Smith, and William G. McAdoo failed to achieve the necessary two-thirds majority. After 17 days, Davis won the party nomination but lost the general election to Calvin Coolidge, a Republican (Kennedy, 2020). However, this has not happened since 1952. Now, the party's candidate campaigns across the country to gain support in the popular vote.

Finally, the General Election takes place, the day when eligible voters elect their new president and running mate. It is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

It should be noted that presidential elections are not without cost. For the 2020 election, \$14 billion was spent on the campaign trail by presidential and congressional candidates. This is double the amount spent on the 2016 election (BBC, 11/19/2020). The presidential race alone reportedly cost \$6.6 billion, most of which was spent on advertising (New York Time, 10/28/2020). This can be a major obstacle for smaller competitors.

IV. Electoral College

As said at the beginning of this section, the president and vice president are elected through a process called the Electoral College. Thus, the winner announced in November is only a predicted winner; the actual winner is not elected until mid-December, when the electors vote.

Electors are chosen in a two-part process. First, the political parties in each state select potential electors before the general election. Second, statewide electors are elected by the voters in each state. There are 538 electors in total, of which 100 are senators, 435 are members of the House of Representatives, and 3 are representatives from the District of Columbia. However, electors are not necessarily members of Congress or representatives of the House. The number of electors in each state is equal to the number of members of Congress from that state, i.e., the total number of Senators, plus the total number of members of the House of Representatives. If we take the example of the state of California for the 2020 election, since there were two California Senators (Dianne Feinstein³ and in 2020 Kamala Harris who left her seat to Alex Padilla⁴) (Senate.gov, 2021) and 53 House Representatives (House.gov, 2021), California gets 55 electors (National Archives, 05/11/2019) for the presidential election. It is the state with the most electors in the United States.

It should be noted that electors are not constitutionally required to vote for the candidate chosen by the majority of their state. However, if an elector votes for someone else, (s)he can

³ California Senior Senator since 1992 (<https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/about-dianne>, accessed 08/11/2022)

⁴ California Senator since 2021, he got Harris' seat when she became vice president (<https://www.padilla.senate.gov/about/>, accessed 08/11/2022)

be fined, disqualified, replaced, or even prosecuted. Therefore, electors always follow the advice of their state's electors to avoid any repercussions.

As said at the beginning, when Americans vote in November, they are electing an expected winner. When they vote, they are not voting for a particular candidate, but for the vote of the state electors in their state that will cast ballots for their preferred candidate in the electoral college vote in December. This means that you are not directly electing a presidential candidate, but you are selecting the electors pledged to vote for your preferred candidate. The electors will then support the choice of the majority of votes from their state by voting for president and vice president in their state capitals. Thus, the electors never come together as one body, at least not in elections.

In the end, the candidate who gets a minimum of 270 electoral college votes wins and becomes the newly elected president. The newly elected president and vice president are then inaugurated. The inauguration always takes place on January 20.

V. Special Situations

In the United States, it is possible to win the popular vote but lose the election because of the Electoral College system. However, this has only happened five times in U.S. history. Albert Arnold Gore Jr. (Bill Clinton's vice president from 1993 to 2001) and Hilary Clinton are the only living examples of this particular situation. It happened three times before these two: with Andrew Jackson in 1824 who lost to John Quincy Adams; with Samuel Tilden defeated by Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876; and with Grover Cleveland defeated in 1888 by Benjamin Harrison (Brower, 2019: 302-303). The latest being Hilary Clinton who won the popular vote but still lost to Donald Trump during the 2016 election. She received 61 million votes to Trump's 60 million (Independent, 11/16/2016).

The second special situation is when no candidate wins a majority of the electoral votes. The vote then moves to the House of Representatives. It is then the members of the House who elect the president from the top three candidates. This situation is even rarer than the first because it has only happened twice in history, the first time in the election of 1800 when Thomas Jefferson won over Aaron Burr to become the third president of the United States. The second time was in 1824, when John Quincy Adams became the sixth president and defeated Andrew Jackson (USHouseHistory, 2022).

Section 2: President

To better understand why Kamala Harris was not a good pick for president, it is necessary to understand what is at stake. Only by being aware of the roles of a president today can we assess whether or not a candidate is a good choice for the position.

1. Role Over Time

The role of the president has been defined as such in the Act II, Section 2 of the Constitution, written in 1787, as written on the website ‘The Constitution Annotated’:

The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States; he may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any Subject relating to the Duties of their respective Offices, and he shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offences against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment.

He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Law: but the Congress may by Law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the Courts of Law, or in the Heads of Departments.

The President shall have Power to fill up all Vacancies that may happen during the Recess of the Senate, by granting Commissions which shall expire at the End of their next Session. (Constitution of the United States of America, Section 2, Act II, 1789).

In summary, the president is given military power, diplomatic power, appointment power and legislative power. The first makes him the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. This was created to balance the powers. And prevent a military general from taking over the government. The second power, diplomatic power, gives the president the ability to sign treaties with foreign countries. However, this cannot be done if more than one-third of the senators do not agree. This power also includes taking parts in meetings with ambassadors and other ministers. The power of appointment leads to the role of the president to appoint, as mentioned above, ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, Supreme Court justices, and all other officers of the United States. Again, the decision must be approved by at least two-thirds of the voting Senators. Through the legislative branch, the president gains the right to veto legislation. In fact, every bill must be approved by the president, so if (s)he vetoes it,

the bill is not implemented. However, Congress can override a presidential veto, but only if it gets a two-thirds vote in each house (Ragone, 2004).

The powers granted by the Constitution are so limited that Congress actually dominated the executive branch until 1930. The only presidents who did not play second fiddle to Congress before 1930 were Andrew Jackson (president from 1829 to 1837), Abraham Lincoln (president from 1861 to 1865), Theodore Roosevelt (president from 1901 to 1909), and Woodrow Wilson (president from 1913 to 1921). These four presidents paved the way for the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt (president from 1933 to 1945), which marked a turning point and led to what is now called the modern presidency (USHistory.org).

2. Role Today

The role of the president has not changed much since 1787, when Act II, Section 2 of the Constitution was written. Today, the president is the **chief executive**, the **head of state**, and the **commander-in-chief**. (S)he is the dominant force in American government and politics. The office of the president is a 24/7 job, (s)he must always be ready to take action, if necessary, no matter if (s)he is on vacation or in quiet times. The typical duties that a president must perform are varied. Among other things, (s)he may receive security briefings from the heads of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Administration (NSA) (Ragone, 2004: 84-86).

(S)he can also make phone calls to other heads of state, as was the case between Biden and Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian president, about the war in Ukraine (White House, 2022). The U.S. president also meets with members of Congress, governors, and cabinet members. (S)he is also required to have lunch with the vice president and attend certain **public events and ceremonies**. (S)he is required to discuss policy with his or her advisors and staff and with the media. The president signs bills and executive orders that become law. Finally, (s)he must attend fundraisers and travel on behalf of candidates, an aspect that has increased over the past 20 years. In short, meetings, events, briefings, speeches and public ceremonies punctuate the life of the president. To ensure that everything happens on time and gets done, his or her chief of staff assiduously governs the president's time and schedule.

But more importantly, in addition to all these responsibilities, the president also has significant powers. For example, as **head of state**, (s)he can make judicial and executive

appointments, although his or her nominees must be approved by the Senate. (S)he can also grant reprieves, which means (s)he can reduce the severity or length of a criminal's sentence. (S)he can also expunge the conviction, and thus the guilt and conviction of a convicted person when (s)he grants pardons. One of the most famous pardons was granted by President Ford (president from 1974 to 1977) to former President Nixon in 1974. Nixon had been disgraced and resigned following the 1974 Watergate scandal (History, 2009).

As **commander-in-chief**, the president can manage and execute military actions during wartime. As the chief diplomat, the president can also make treaties or agreements, and recognize foreign governments. In addition to all this, the president also plays an important role in the legislative process, (s)he can propose legislation and, as said before, (s)he has a veto power, which means that (s)he can reject any legislation passed by Congress. Finally, as party leader, (s)he also has certain powers, such as selecting the chairperson of the national committee or drafting the party's political platform at the nominating convention, influencing party members and campaigning for candidates.

In terms of **leadership styles**, scholars distinguish three main styles: delegators, micro-managers and charismatic leaders. Delegators are those who, like Franklin Roosevelt (president from 1901 to 1909) or Ronald Reagan (president from 1981 to 1989), rely on their staff to implement their policies and bring a bold vision of government to the White House. They have the advantage of using their staff to successfully advance their agendas. The second type is the micromanager who takes an active role in business. They have no great vision but are obsessed with the administrative details of the office. These are presidents like Jimmy Carter (president from 1977 to 1981) or Lyndon B. Johnson (president from 1963 to 1969). Finally, the last type, the charismatic leader. Like President John F. Kennedy (president from 1961 to 1963) or President Bill Clinton (president from 1993 to 2001), they are excellent communicators and very charismatic. They excel at using the media to project a youthful, vibrant, and active image of themselves (Ragone, 2004: 86-87).

Role of the Vice President Today:

It is important to point out that the president has a unique relationship with his or her vice president, which is why the role of the vice president today is hereby developed. Today, the conditions for a candidate to become vice president are the same than for the president, so (s)he must be at least 35 years old and must have resided in the U.S.A for at least 14 years. Even if it is similar to the president, one point distinguishing both offices is that there is no limit to the number of terms that a vice president can do.

The position of the American vice president as we know it today, i.e., a position of considerable power, emerged only in 1976 with President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Walter Mondale (Goldstein, 2008). The duo changed the rules regarding the vice presidency through an agreement. This agreement contained three major requirements wanted by Mondale which where that the vice president should have unlimited access to the president; that (s)he should have access to the same classified material than the president, and that (s)he should get unimpeded institutional responsibilities. These made of Mondale the first truly powerful vice president (Brower, 2019: 284). Which is why vice presidents used to ask his advice as they were in the office.

The only function given by the Constitution to the vice president is to be the president of the Senate. And even that cannot be done at freewill. The vice president can only use his or her power in case of tie vote in the Senate, which are rare. In this case, his voice is decisive. The vice president is the link between the president and the Congress, (s)he represents the legislative branch.

According to Bruce Reed “[t]he Vice President’s real power derives from his relationship with the President” (Brower, 2019: 32). The missions attributed to the vice president depend on the good willing of the president. For example, Mike Pence had mainly dealt with the Coronavirus crisis, but his role remained limited. Under Barack Obama, Vice President Biden took part in the economic recovery after the 2008 crisis and had an adviser role (Arte, 2020). Biden’s pieces of advice were important to Barack Obama, as he sought them twice a week; he was especially interested in his vice president’s opinion on foreign policy matter (Brower, 2019: 90). All the powers that Biden acquired were due to an agreement he had with Barack Obama. These were five ground rules written in a private document. The rules were that the vice president and the president should have weekly meetings; that Biden could sit at any meeting of Obama; that all words (printed) destined to Obama also went to Biden; that

Biden's staff should be included in any Obama's staff meeting, and that Biden was to be involved in everything and so not have a portfolio (Brower, 2019: 95).

Vice presidents usually are attributed a number of informal duties such as being the unofficial spokesperson or the president's confidant. The main role of the vice president is to take over if the president dies, resigns, or is removed. This only happened nine times, but it also works if the president has to undergo anesthesia (NowThis World, 2016).

3. Qualities Needed to Become President

a) Theoretical Background

This section traces back the research about the qualities or about what it takes to be considered as a top candidate for the presidency. In contrast to what may be thought, it is not a subject that is easy to make research about because there are many variables at play (e.g., every candidate and every situation is different). From this theoretical background will be built the framework that will be used to analyze Kamala Harris.

According to an INSIDER Poll from 2019⁵, there are ten qualities that could qualify a candidate to be president. (S)he should have been a governor, grown up middle class, been a vice president, have released tax returns, be a member of the Senate, a military veteran, have grown up poor, be a member of the House of Representatives, be fifty or younger, and/or be multilingual. These ten qualities are said to increase one's chance of becoming president.

When Donald Trump is analyzed against these criteria, he does not tick many of these cases. He was not a governor, he did not grow up poor nor middle class, he was not a vice president, and most importantly, he did not release his tax returns, which actually created a big scandal. He also was not a member of the Senate, was not a military veteran, was not a member of the House of Representatives, was over 50 when he was elected (he was actually 70 when he was elected president), and is not multilingual (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022). An in-depth analysis of Donald Trump against these criteria can be found in Section 4, point a).

When we take the same qualities and apply them to Joe Biden, we also find that he does not have all the qualities either, but he still does better than Trump. He was vice president under Barack Obama from 2009 to 2017. He was a senator; he grew up in a middle-class family; and he has released his tax returns. Although he is now 79, so over 50, he has not been a

⁵ *The 10 Qualities American Voters Look for Most in a Presidential Candidate*, INSIDER, 2019

member of the House of Representatives, nor a veteran of the armed forces (The White House, 2021); and according to my research, he is not multilingual. An in-depth analysis of Joe Biden against these criteria can be found in Section 4, point a). The analyses of both former and current president are summed up in a comparative table in Section 4, point b).

An older paper, *Qualities a President Needs*, written by Victor L. Albjerg and published in 1952, states that a presidential candidate must have a great personality, to begin with. The candidate must also understand the current situation in which (s)he finds himself or herself and must tailor his or her program to find solutions to the problems that may be encountered. In addition, the future political leader must have a good voice, be able to sway an audience with his or her eloquence and be photogenic. It is also important that the person demonstrates confidence in his or her program and ability to execute it. The candidate must also have overwhelming support, and when giving a speech, (s)he must give the illusion of saying what (s)he thinks out loud, of simply sharing what (s)he thinks with the audience. Again, when it comes to speeches, the future president must have good repartee and an awareness of what is possible. (S)he must also be courageous, robust and able to accept criticism with a smile. Thus: "[t]he candidate who can mobilize the most effective words may well win the election." (Albjerg, 1952: 131).

Nevertheless, there is another quality that was not mentioned in Albjerg's article because it did not exist at the time, but it is a quality that is becoming increasingly important for a potential presidential candidate. This necessary quality is **the ability to use social media** in their campaign. In their article 'Social Media and Electioneering: The Case of the United States 2016 Presidential Election', Folarin and Chijioke Ekwueme explain that now "political candidates have used social media in the twenty-first century as a tool not just for political awareness of the electorates, but also for political mobilization, participation and to checkmate their leaders" (Folarin and Ekwueme, 2018). This shows the growing impact of social media on elections and voters' choice. Also, according to the paper, social media was used more as a source of information to learn about elections in 2016 than more traditional means such as local and national print newspapers. Not surprisingly, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump posted 1,103 tweets and Facebook posts in the span of twenty days between May 11 and 31, 2016 (Folarin & Chijioke, 2018). This impact of social media also explains the success that Donald Trump has experienced as he is the most famous

president for his presence on social media, which he has been banned from since January 2021. Even though he has been banned from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, he decided to create his own platform: Truth Social⁶. This is obviously a way for him to return to the presidential scene since his first post on this social network was "Get ready! Your favorite president will see you soon." (BBC News, 02/21/2022). If social media was not important in elections and for candidates, Trump would not have taken the time to create his own platform. Thus, the ability to use social media to one's advantage has now become a necessary quality for a candidate seeking to be elected.

As previously stated, one of the most common ways to become president is to become vice president first. However, the future of the vice president is tied to the presidency of the president under whom (s)he served. This point is relevant for the analysis of Kamala Harris' chances of becoming president in 2024, as developed in Section 5 and in the conclusion. The results of the research appearing in the paper 'Influence of candidate qualities and previous president performance in voting intentions' carried out by Giner and Fuentes-Blasco published in 2014 states that "the previous incumbent's performance directly affects the electorate's voting influence" (Giner et al, 2014: 267). They take the example of Bush and Obama to prove their point, the worse Bush was rated, the higher the voting intention for Obama. Thus, the successes and failures of the incumbent president will affect whether or not someone is elected. In our case, whether or not his or her vice president, who is running for president, can ascend to the highest office in the United States. For this reason, it is important to understand how sitting presidents succeed.

Since every presidency is different, it is difficult to list the factors that determine a president's success. According to the article 'These are the top 25 U.S. presidents, according to historians and biographers (and why you won't find Trump on the list),' the Business Insider believes the highest ranked president is Abraham Lincoln, followed by George Washington and Franklin D. Roosevelt (Business Insider, 07/02/2020). But this is disputed by CBSNews, which ranks George Washington as the highest-ranked president of all time (CBSNews, 02/03/2021). In reviewing several rankings, two of which are mentioned above, it became apparent that there is no consensus on which president was the best and why.

⁶ Social media launched by Donald Trump on February 21, 2022 to 'stand up to the tyranny of big tech' (<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60922717>, accessed 07/22/2022)

This is a problem that Shirin Sharif confronted in her article ‘What makes a successful president? Measuring success through our last five presidents’. In this article, the author decided to determine the presidential success scores of five presidents, namely Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. In order to make the analysis as objective as possible, the author selected three dimensions to determine whether or not a president was successful: the external factors he faced during his presidency and how he dealt with them, the scores he received in public opinion polls while in office, and legislative success in fulfilling presidential promises. The goal is to "formulate a comprehensive, systematic, and unbiased assessment of how presidential success can be measured." (Sharif, 2006).

b) Framework

Creating such a framework is not simple as many variables are not easily quantifiable. For example, the ones put forward by Albjerg (1952) pertaining to personality are too subjective and could lead to false evaluation and thus wrong results. As a result, I will focus on the variables that are easier to measure, such as those identified by Business Insider (2020).

My framework thus consists of two separate parts which are the professional background and the personal background. The former takes into account the experience acquired and the political offices favoring the accession to the presidential office. The second part mainly focuses on the personal background, including the socio-economical background, race, age, level of education, and so on.

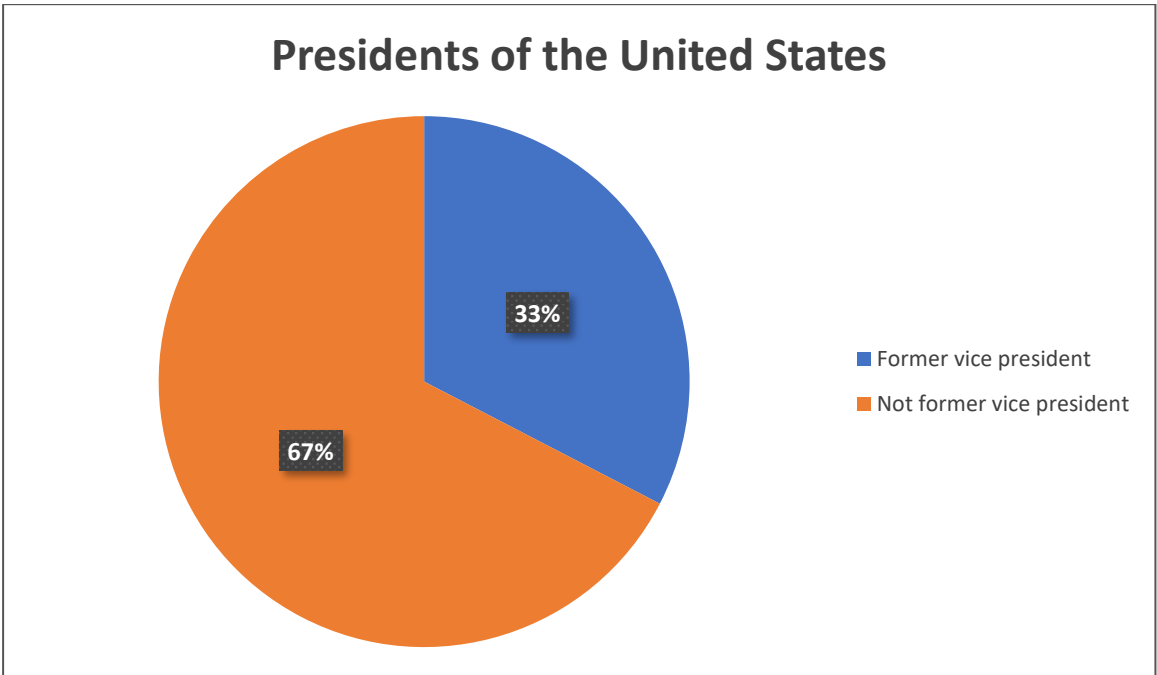
This framework will then be applied to Kamala Harris and her 2020 presidential campaign to try to see why she was unsuccessful at becoming the 46th president of the United States of America. This will be explored in Section 4.

I. Professional Background

i. Political Offices and Experience

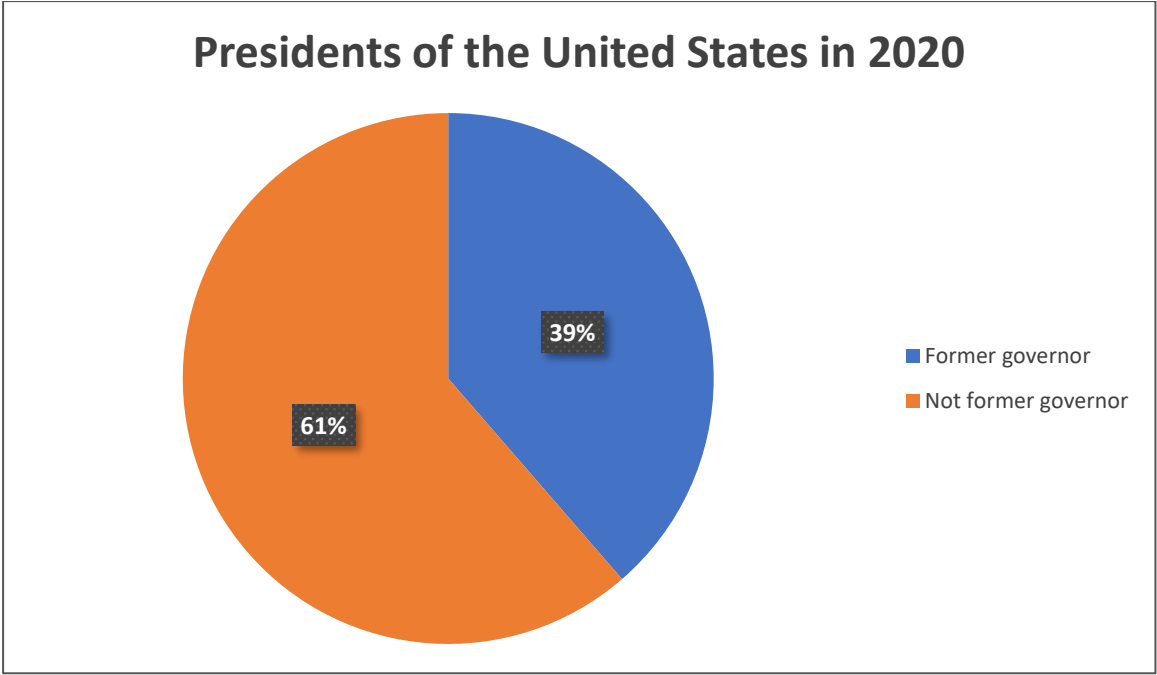
This category takes into account the professional background of the candidate. As seen before, candidates with political or military experience are more likely to become president. This includes having been vice president, a governor, a Member of the Senate, a Member of the House of Representatives or being a military veteran. Though it should be pointed out that it is not necessary to have one of these experiences to become president, as can be seen with Donald Trump.

The first path leading to the presidency is the **vice presidency**. It is said that it is easier to reach the presidential office if one was vice president at first. If we take a closer look at the U.S. presidential and vice-presidential history, it is to note, so far, that fifteen vice presidents have become president at some point. Among them, eight succeeded because of the death of the sitting president (Brower, 2019: 39). And only four sitting vice presidents succeeded in becoming president right after their vice president office. These four are John Adams (president from 1797 to 1801), Thomas Jefferson (president from 1801 to 1805), Martin Van Buren (president from 1837 to 1841), and George H.W. Bush (president from 1989 to 1993) (Brower, 2019: 41).



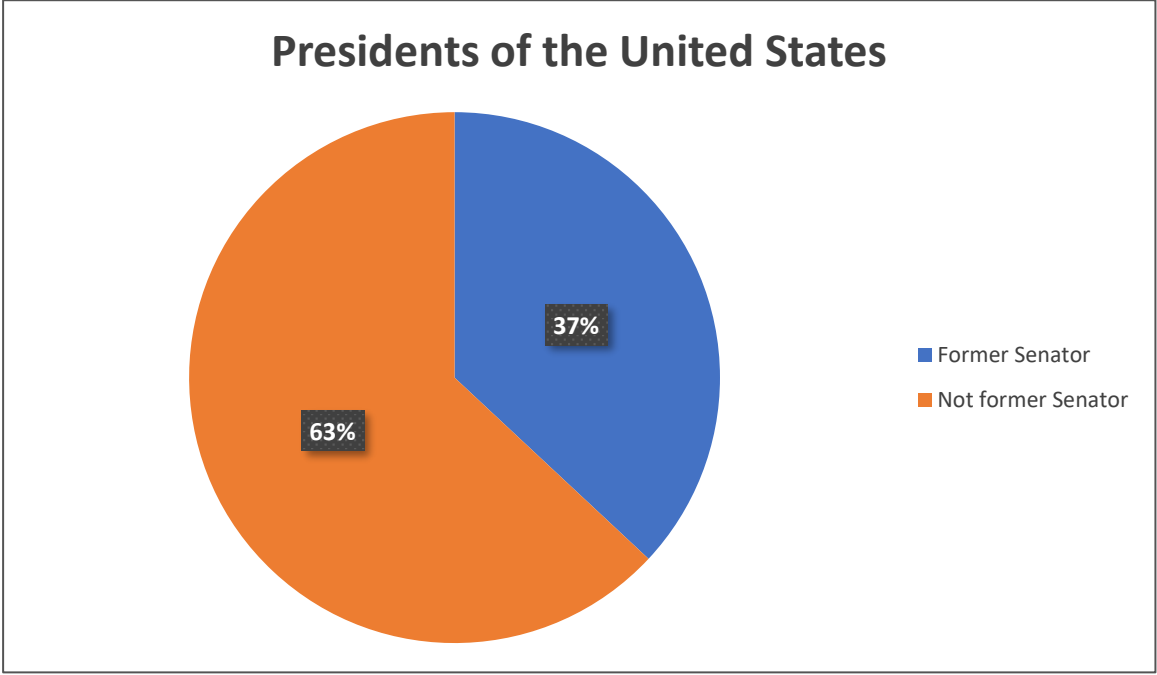
Graph 1: Percentage of presidents of the United States of America who were former vice presidents (n=46)

The second path to become president is being a former **governor**. At the time of Donald Trump’s Presidency, seventeen presidents out of the 44 presidents ever elected in the U.S. had been a governor in their life. This represents 39% of the presidents. Four out of the seven more recent presidents at that time were governors. These are Governors Jimmy Carter (president from 1977 to 1981), Ronald Reagan (president from 1981 to 1989), Bill Clinton (president from 1993 to 2001), and George W. Bush (president from 2001 to 2009) who were respectively the 39th, 40th, 42nd and 43rd presidents of the United States (Eagleton Center on the American Governor, 2020).



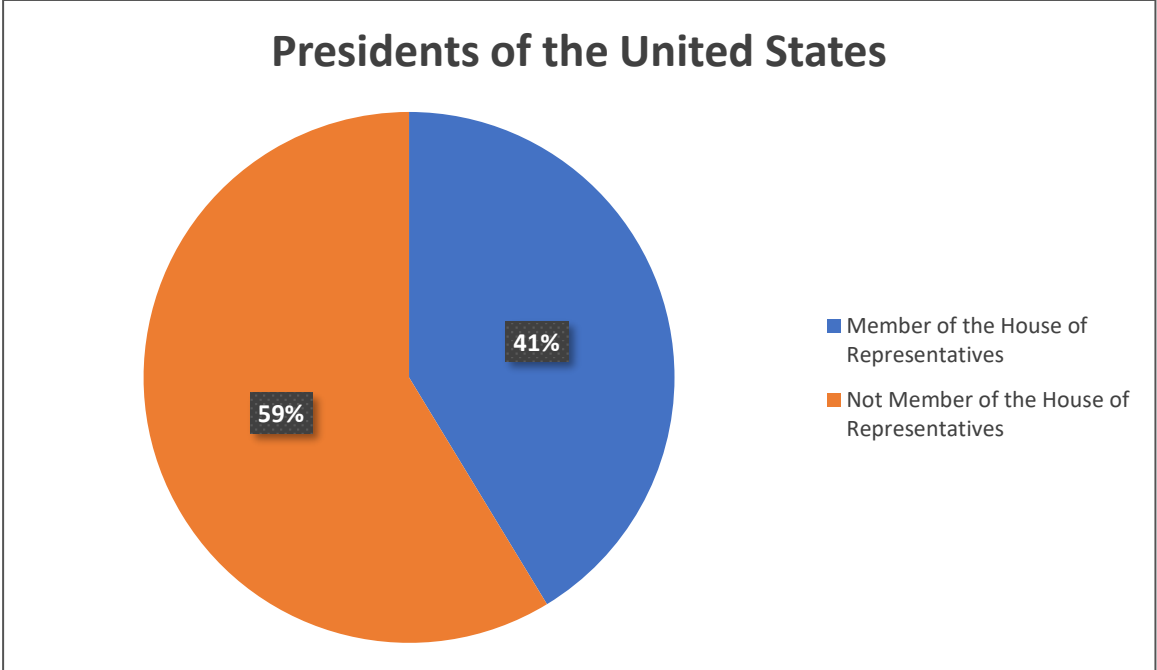
Graph 2: Percentage of presidents of the United States of America who were governors (n=44)

Being a **Senator** is the third possible path to become president of the U.S. seventeen senators became president, among which three of them moved directly from the Senate to the White House. These three are Warren G. Harding (president from 1921 to 1923), John F. Kennedy (president from 1961 to 1963), and Barack Obama (president from 2009 to 2017). The current President, Joe Biden, was also a Senator from 1973 to 2009 (Senate.gov, 2022).



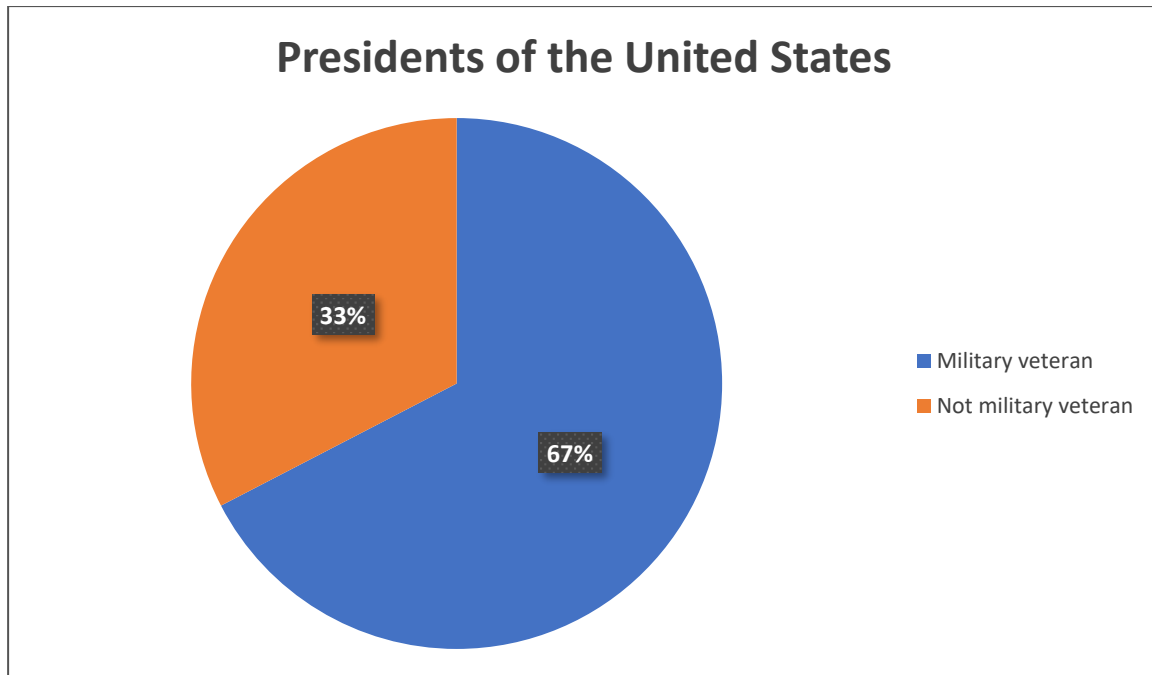
Graph 3: Percentage of presidents of the United States of America who were former Senators (n=46)

The fourth path to the presidency concerns **being a former Member of the House of Representatives**. In fact, nineteen Members of the House of Representatives served as president since 1789. Among the most recent ones are John F. Kennedy (president from 1961 to 1963), Lyndon B. Johnson (president from 1963 to 1969), Richard M. Nixon (president from 1969 to 1974), Gerald Ford (president from 1974 to 1977), and George H.W. Bush (president from 1989 to 1993). Four out of the nineteen members were not elected but succeeded in case of death or resignation, namely John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, Andrew Johnson, and Gerald Ford (history.house.gov, 2022).



Graph 4: Percentage of presidents of the United States of America who were former Members of the House of Representatives (n=46)

The last professional experience which is common to a majority of presidents is **military service**: 31 presidents served in the United States Army. It means that only 15 out of the 46 presidents did not serve in the army during their life. The most notable presidents who did not serve are Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Barack Obama and Bill Clinton. The last president to have served in the military was George W. Bush, and the last one to have seen combat was George H.W. Bush. Before World War II, most of the presidents came from the Army, but since then, most of them come from the Navy (Military Benefits, 2021).



Graph 5: Percentage of presidents of the United States of America who served in the army (n=46)

According to the Vox article ‘Donald Trump is the only U.S. president ever with no political or military experience’, Donald Trump was the first president in 227 years who lacked both political and military services (see Appendix 3: Graph 1: Donald Trump will be the only president in US history with no political or military experience prior to taking office).⁷

In conclusion, a presidential candidate has more chance of achieving his or her goal if (s)he has the right former experience. The experience of being a former governor, vice president, military veteran, or member of the Congress, which includes the House of Representatives as well as the Senate increases the chances of being elected president of the United States of America.

⁷ Before 2016, the average of years in public office was of thirteen years and the average years of military service of 5.6 years for the U.S. presidents who came into the White House. Former President Zachary Taylor is the one with the longest military service as he served for 40 years. He is followed by former President Dwight Eisenhower who served for 37 years in the army. Regarding the public office, former President Martin van Buren served 31 years, which makes him the president with the longest public office years so far (Vox, 2017).

II. Personal Background

This section takes four different variables into account. These four variables are race, gender, and level of education. The analysis is based on the presidents from George Washington (president from 1789 to 1797). The purpose is to see what characteristics should one possess to increase his or her chances to attain the presidential office.

i. Race

The former presidents were all white, with the only exception of Barack Obama (president from 2008 to 2016), the 44th president, who was the first person of color to have ever held the prestigious position. This shows the impact of race in the United States and its impact on the presidential elections. It also shows that white men are more likely to be elected president than people of color.

The race gap (the differences between Black and White) shows that Black people are often less educated, less wealthy, live shorter, and have more health issues. Moreover, less than a third of Black students get their bachelor's degree or higher. For white students, almost the half of them attain at least the bachelor's degree (Reuters, 2020). However, the majority of presidents of the U.S. have had a bachelor's degree and the majority of them were at least in their fifties when elected, as will be shown later. Thus, being less educated and having more health issues diminish the chances for Black people to be elected. This shows that race and level of education are linked. The race will, in fact, influence the level of education one can receive and their chances of becoming a college graduate or not. The main point of this section is thus that race has an impact on success.

The question of race is also related to the concept of prototypical citizen. As explained by van Berkel et al. (2017), members of the dominant group (here, white U.S. citizens) associate themselves more with the American identity and they feel like they own more over American national identity in comparison to minority groups. It comes out of this study that male-associated traits are considered as more American than females ones. This means that the prototypical citizen would be a white U.S. citizen man (van Berkel et al., 2017). When some people decide to vote for their president, they are more likely to vote for a white man since he reminds them of what the "true" American is. Thus, race plays a role in determining the likelihood of being elected president.⁸

⁸ This probably does not apply to all Americans but more to citizens that believe in this conception of "prototypical" U.S. citizen.

ii. Gender

Again, the idea of prototypical citizen, as explained above, plays a role here. Since male-associated traits are considered as reflecting more what the “true” American is than female ones (van Berkel et al., 2017), some voters would be more likely to elect a man than a woman as president. Moreover, the president is considered as the person representing the country, so the more (s)he is associated to the idea of being a true American, in the eyes of some Americans the more chances (s)he gets to ever be elected⁹.

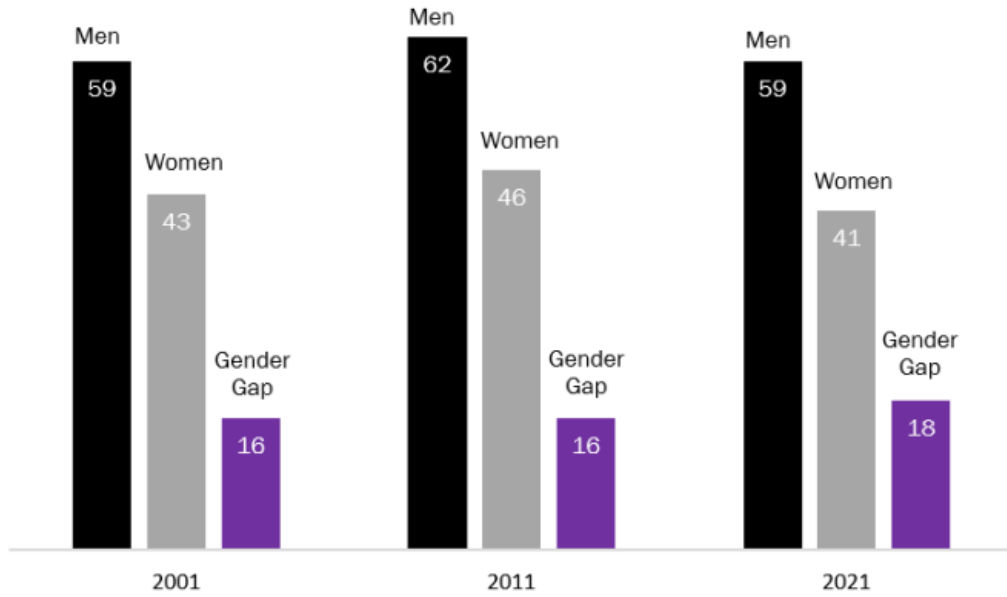
According to a study by Rhee and Sigler (2015), people, even women, tend to see male leaders as more effective than female ones. They also showed that working with a male leader is preferable to working with a female leader (Rhee and Sigler, 2015). This could also explain why no women have reached the office of president of the United States yet.

It is no surprise to say that there were only men elected president in the history of the United States. Yet in 2019, six women announced their candidacy for president: Representative Tulsi Gabbard (Democrat), Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (Democrat), Senator Kamala Harris (Democrat), Senator Amy Klobuchar (Democrat), Senator Elizabeth Warren (Democrat), and Marianne Williamson. It was also the first time ever that more than two women competed in the same major party’s presidential primary process. Before 2016, no woman had ever been a major party’s presidential nominee. The first woman to become a major party’s presidential nominee was Hillary Clinton in 2016 (Rutgers.edu, 2022). Thus, it seems to go without saying that being a woman is not a trait that will open the presidential door.

If we take a look at the graph below (Graph 6), we can clearly see that more men than women have considered running for office over the last decades. We can even see that the gender gap increased between 2011 and 2021. It seems that not only are women less likely to run for office, and as a result they are less likely to be elected in the future if the trend continues.

⁹ This probably does not apply to all Americans but more to citizens that believe in this conception of “prototypical” U.S. citizen.

Percentage of Potential Candidates Who Have Considered Running for Office



Note: Data are from the authors' Citizen Political Ambition Studies. Bars represent the percentages of lawyers, business leaders, educators, and political activists who reported that they ever considered running for office and the gender gap at each point in time.

10

Graph 6: Percentage of Potential Candidates Who Have Considered Running for Office (n=4,000)

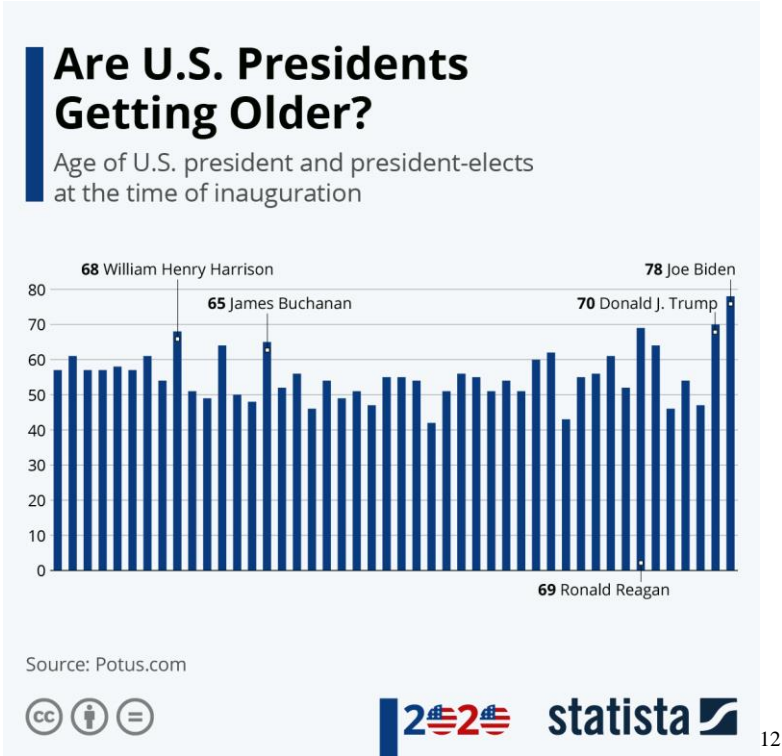
iii. Age

Regarding age, the median age of presidents when they take office is of approximately 56 years old. The Republican president split almost equally above and below this median age while around two-thirds of Democratic presidents have been younger than 56 years old when they took office. The youngest president of the United States was Theodore Roosevelt who was 42 years old when he took office. The current president, Joe Biden, was 78 years old when he took office, making him the oldest president of the United States ever (Statistica, 2021).

The chart below shows the age of U.S. presidents over time. The last two presidents were the oldest ever. One may conclude that the presidents are getting older and older. Though, if one takes a look at Barack Obama, he was 47 years old when elected. This is 23 years younger than President Trump and 31 years younger than President Biden. It may be worth waiting for

¹⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2022/02/08/running-for-office-is-still-for-men-some-data-on-the-ambition-gap/> (accessed on 08/09/2022)

the next presidents before jumping to the conclusion that presidents are getting older and older.¹¹



Graph 7: Age of U.S. President and President-elects at the Time of Inauguration (n=46)

iv. Level of Education

In this section, we consider Bill Clinton (president from 1993 to 2001), George W. Bush (president from 2001 to 2009), Barack Obama (president from 2009 to 2017), Donald Trump (president from 2017 to 2021), and Joe Biden (president since 2021). These five presidents have different lives but still tend to have the same level of education. Bill Clinton, the 42nd president graduated from Yale University and received his law degree in 1973, after graduating from Georgetown University in 1968. George W. Bush, the president after Bill Clinton, graduated from Yale and then got a business degree from Harvard. Barack Obama (president from 2009-2017) graduated with a degree in political science and international relations in 1983 from Columbia University. Five years later he attended Harvard Law

¹¹ Moreover, according to a study by Zhang et al. (2021), the next president would probably begin service at around 61 years old. According to their algorithm, the next president will be between 56 and 66 when starting his or her service (Zhang et al., 2021). This suggests that the Americans might not get older and older presidents.

¹² <https://www.statista.com/chart/19665/age-of-us-presidents-at-inauguration/> (accessed 06/23/2022)

School. The president from 2017 to 2021, Donald Trump, went to the New York Military Academy and then to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. So even though Trump seems like an outlier among the other presidents in several areas matters, like other presidents, he has a prestigious educational background. The current president Joe Biden graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Delaware and with a law degree from Syracuse University (the White House, 2021).

In conclusion, it seems that getting at least a bachelor's degree brings one closer to the presidential seat. It does not look like having a higher degree or a PhD gives any more chance to become president since none of the last five presidents got one. Three out of the five presidents got law degree, this is more than half of them. This implies that getting a law degree increases one's chance of becoming president, but in a smaller way than getting a bachelor's degree.

Among all the presidents in history, out of the 46 presidents, 20 attended some form of graduate school, and 16 attended law school, which is the most common degree sought (Pioneer, 2022). This supports the argument that law school increases a candidate's chance of becoming president.

Regarding the education, an argument was brought earlier regarding the multilingualism of presidents. It was said that a candidate has more chance of being elected if (s)he speaks more than one language, if (s)he is multilingual.

Among the 21st century presidents, only Bill Clinton is bilingual. In fact, he studied German at college while he was at Georgetown University. Thanks to this experience, he acquired proficiency in the language and even used it in 1994 in a speech at the Brandenburg Gate.

Even though no other president was bilingual, there were two honorable mentions. The first one goes to George W. Bush who lived in Texas for many years and acquired basic knowledge of Spanish. He also used this language in a few of his speeches. However, since his pronunciation was mocked (due to his accent when he spoke), he cannot be considered as perfect bilingual. The second honorable mention concerns Barack Obama who spoke a little bit in Indonesian in one of his speeches. He acquired basic knowledge of the language when living in Indonesia with his mother and stepfather for four years when he was a child. He cannot be considered as a perfect bilingual either, but he still had some knowledge of Indonesian (Babbel Magazine, 2020).

In conclusion, more than one language does not seem to be a prerequisite to becoming president of the United States.

Section 3: Kamala Harris

1. Her Biography¹³

It is important to get to know Kamala Harris better in order to understand where she has failed and where she gets her success from. What happened in her career before the 2020 election impacted her presidential campaign and still impacts her chances of becoming president in the future. As we will see, before becoming the first-ever female African American and Asian American vice president of the United States, Harris accomplished a lot.

Kamala, to be pronounced "Comma-la" (Harris, 2019: XIV), Harris was born in 1964 in Oakland, California. Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, a biologist and breast cancer specialist, was an Indian woman who came to the United States in 1960 to pursue a doctorate. She had a great influence on Kamala Harris. This is evidenced by the way Harris talks about her mother and her impact on Kamala Harris' life in her autobiography *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey* (2019). Her father, Donald J. Harris, is an economist and professor emeritus from Jamaica who came to the United States in 1961 to earn a PhD as well. He seems to have had less influence on his daughter than Shyamala Gopalan because Kamala Harris mentions him less in her autobiography and interviews than her mother. Kamala is also the oldest of two children; her younger sister Maya has a daughter, Meena. Kamala Harris is very close to her sister and niece. Donald Harris and Shyamala Gopalan divorced when Kamala was seven and she went to live with her mother in Montreal.

After attending a French school in elementary school, Kamala graduated from Westmount High School in Quebec, Canada in 1981. After that, she decided to return to Washington, D.C. to pursue a degree in political science and economics at Howard University, known as a private, historically Black, federally chartered research university. She graduated in 1986 and then continued her education by enrolling in the University of California, Hastings College of

¹³ This section is based on the following secondary sources: *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey* by Kamala Harris (2019), *Kamala Harris: The biography* by University Press (2020), *Kamala Harris: The future of America* by Jean-Eric Branaa (2021), and *Kamala's Way: An American Life* by Dan Morain (2021), with whom an interview was conducted (see Appendix 2).

the Law in San Francisco. She earned a law degree in 1989 and was admitted to the California bar a year later on her second attempt.

During her college years, Kamala Harris not only studied, but was also actively involved in various associations. At Howard University, she served as president of the economics society, joined a student union (Alpha Kappa Alpha), led the debate team, and interned as a mailroom attendant. While attending law school, she became president of the Black Law Students Association.

She began her professional life as an assistant district attorney in California. She was later appointed to the state's Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board and then to the California Medical Assistance Board by her then-boyfriend, Willie Brown, a Democratic politician who served as mayor of San Francisco from 1996 to 2004 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2022). A few years later, in 1998, she was hired by Terence Hallinan to become an assistant district attorney in San Francisco. As an assistant district attorney, she was head of the career criminal division, where she was responsible for prosecuting homicides, robberies, sexual assaults, and burglaries. In the early 2000s, she began working for Louise Renne, who was a prosecutor at San Francisco City Hall. There she was in charge of the Family and Children's Services Division.

In 2003, she won the District Attorney election against Hallinan, making her the first person of color to be elected District Attorney (DA) in San Francisco. During her tenure, she fought against the death penalty and the three strikes principle for non-violent offenses. This principle is to punish third-time criminals more harshly, regardless of the severity of the crime. She had no problem getting re-elected in 2007. She maintained her position against the death penalty. This had a negative impact on her reputation with the San Francisco Police Department after the Isaac Espinoza case. Espinoza was a San Francisco police officer who was shot and killed in 2004 while on duty. And despite being pressured by several senators and the San Francisco Police Officers Association, Harris refused to sentence the murderer to death. The case left a stain on her reputation, especially within the San Francisco Police Department. She has a reputation as a progressive but tough-on-crime attorney.

One of the initiatives that made Harris popular is her Back on Track program. The goal of this program is to help non-violent offenders reintegrate into life in a more just manner. The results of her program have shown that less than ten percent of graduates from this program have re-offended. This is an improvement over the typical 53% of California offenders who end up in jail once more within two years. In addition, Kamala Harris' idea is also an economical benefit since it costs less than readjusting a record and housing a low-level offender.

Another measure Harris took when she was district attorney involved students skipping classes. Students through eighth grade could not miss more than ten percent of school days. She prosecuted the parents of students who regularly skipped school, with penalties ranging from \$2,000 to one year in jail. The goal was to reduce truancy and restore educational balance, as dropouts were most prevalent among low-income minorities. As a result of these measures, the truancy rate decreased by 23% in 2009. In total, seven parents were prosecuted, and none were sent to prison. Nevertheless, her sanctions were seen as too punitive and as making it even harder for low-income families (University Press, 2020).

In 2011, Kamala Harris became the first woman, the first Black, the first Asian American to become Attorney General of California. She was re-elected in 2014. As Attorney General, she fought mortgage fraud, primarily against JP Morgan Chase and Bank of America. She also advocated for the LGBT community and fought to help minorities or victims of sex trafficking. During her years as Attorney General, she refused to support two initiatives that would have banned the death penalty, giving the impression that her views on capital punishment had changed (University Press, 2020).

In 2014, Kamala Harris married a prominent attorney, Doug Emhoff. She became the stepmother of Emhoff's children from a previous relationship. In 2016, she ran for Barbara Boxer's seat as California Senator and was elected California Senator. During her campaign, she received the support of President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden. In her bid for the Senate, she took a clear stand against Donald Trump and his immigration policies. She was still a senator when she decided to run for president. This happened before the end of her first term in the Senate, which meant she had to resign her Senate seat to campaign.

On January 21, 2019, she publicly announced her intention to become the next president of the United States of America. The date she officially announced her candidacy is also not insignificant since she chose Martin Luther King Jr. Day. However, her run for president ended on December 3, 2019, when she sent an email to all her supporters saying she was suspending her campaign. She stated that she did not have the funds to continue. In March 2020, she decided to endorse Biden and he chose her as his running mate on August 11, 2020.

Since then, she has been elected vice president of the United States of America, becoming the first woman, the first Black woman, and the first Asian American to be elected to the position. She also served as Acting President on November 19, 2021, from 10:10 a.m. to 11:35 a.m., while President Biden was undergoing anesthesia for his colonoscopy. She was the first woman to assume the powers of the presidency of the United States, even though it lasted only 85 minutes (The Washington Post, 11/19/2021).

2. Kamala Harris' Presidential Campaign

Let us take a look back at Kamala Harris' presidential campaign for a moment. It began on January 21, 2019. Her campaign began when she announced her presidential candidacy on ABC's *Good Morning America* talk show. This was one of the highlights of her campaign, as she did so on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. During her campaign, she had two highlights: her announcement and her debate with Biden.

Regarding her announcement, she waited until Martin Luther King Jr Day to announce her candidacy (Morain, 2021: 209). During her announcement speech, she even stated, "I am honored to be able to make my announcement on the day we commemorate him."¹⁴ (The Hill, 01/21/2019). Kamala Harris' parents were both involved in the civil rights movement. As she wrote in her autobiography *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey* (2019), they brought their children, even when they were still sitting in strollers, to street protests. Kamala Harris also said that her mother met Martin Luther King Jr. during his announcement interview on ABC's *Good Morning America*. So, January 21 was personally relevant to her.

¹⁴ By way of reminder, Martin Luther King Jr. fought against racial segregation his entire life and received a Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent actions, he was also a civil rights activist (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

Her announcement speech is a highlight of her campaign. First, because it was made, as said earlier, on an important day. Secondly, because Kamala Harris was straightforward about her goals and what she was fighting for, with an emphasis on justice. From the first moment, she showed her strength of character and determination to get where she wanted to go.

The presidential race debate between Kamala Harris and Joe Biden was the second highlight of the Kamala Harris campaign. The debate took place in June 2019 and, during the debate Harris confronted Biden over past efforts to block busing. Specifically, she publicly attacked Biden for his desire to stop busing. The busing system is a system to combat segregation and promote racial diversity in schools. It was the system that allowed Black children to enter 'white' schools and required schools to have a parity of Black and white students in their schools. Harris was personally involved in this issue as she herself was bused to school as a child. It echoed her personal history. The debate became famous with Kamala Harris' comments on busing, "[t]here was a little girl in California who was part of the second class to integrate her public schools and she was bused to school every day. That little girl was me." (CNN, 06/28/2019). Because of this attack, Harris even became the most popular trending topic in the United States. She was considered the winner of this debate. She and her team knew that it was the culmination of months and months of campaigning. Of course, it was used on social media, as Harris' aides quickly tweeted a photo of Kamala Harris when she was just a child, quoting what she said during that debate.

Even though she did a great job for her presidential campaign in that debate. It could also have been a problem when she was considered to be Joe Biden's running mate. She attacked him and showed his weaknesses publicly, which vice presidents should not do, as we have seen before. So, that could have had dramatic consequences for Kamala Harris. Her chance in all this is that Joe Biden, as discussed with Dr. Altschuler, wanted to show all Americans that he could handle anything. What better decision could he have made than to pick the one candidate who had fiercely attacked him and undeniably won a debate against him. By choosing her, Biden hoped to show that not only can he admit defeat when confronted with it (in this case the debate), but that he can listen to all kinds of views on any subject (Interview Altschuler, 2022). This debate also shows that she was a fierce competitor during the 2020 presidential election. At that moment, during the debate, she had what it takes to become president.

As mentioned earlier, these are two strengths during Harris' presidential campaign. However, according to Mr. Dan Morain, she did not run a good campaign overall (Interview Morain, 2022, see Appendix 2) and this may explain why she stopped running on December 3, 2019. She announced her end of the campaign with an email she sent to her supporters in which she explained that she does not have sufficient funds to continue running for president in 2020.

Section 4: Analysis of Kamala Harris' 2020 Presidential Campaign

1. Section 2 vs. Kamala Harris

a) Kamala Harris' Presidential Qualifications

In this section, we take the framework established previously and see to which extent Kamala Harris fits the qualities found in the majority of presidents. To make this section easier and clearer, she will only be compared to 21st century presidents, namely Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden. It is also more relevant seeing that she could have become president in the 21st century, so it seemed less useful to compare her to previous president and thus old ways of thinking.

Let us take the different qualities developed in the framework and apply them to Kamala Harris. The characteristics applied to Kamala Harris are again separated into two categories: professional past and personal life. For the first category, there are five qualities analyzed, which are (1) being a former vice president, (2) being a former governor, (3) being a former Senator, (4) being a former Member of the House of Representatives, and (5) being a military veteran. For the second category, personal life, four aspects are considered (1) race, (2) gender, (3) age, and (4) the level of education.

As Kamala Harris is compared to 21st century presidents (so candidates who successfully became presidents), a short analysis of these five presidents is needed. The analysis is also based on the framework established in Section 2, and a summary can be found below in comparative charts (Chart 1 and Chart 2). The summary is presented under the form of comparative charts which include Kamala Harris.

Bill Clinton:

Bill Clinton was the 42nd president of the United States, he served from 1993 to 2001. Bill Clinton has not been Vice President in his career. But he has been governor of Arkansas. He was not Senator, nor a Member of the House of Representatives. He also had no military experience. Regarding his personal life, he is a Caucasian man who was 46 years old when elected president. He graduated from Yale in 1973 where he got a law degree (The White House, 2021).

George W. Bush:

As Clinton's follower, George W. Bush is the 43rd president of the U.S. He served from 2001 till 2009. He did not serve as vice president nor as a member of Congress. He was a military veteran when elected, he served 6 years. He was also governor of Texas. Regarding his personal life, George W. Bush is a Caucasian man who was 54 years old when he was elected. He received a business degree from Harvard (The White House, 2021).

Barack Obama:

Barack Obama was president from 2009 to 2017. He was thus the 44th president of the United States. Just like Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, he was not a former vice president when elected. He had also never been governor, but he was elected Senator in 2004. He was not a former member of the House of Representatives, nor did he serve in the army. He is the first president to be African American and not Caucasian. He was 47 years old when he was elected. He went to college. He graduated from Columbia University in political science and international relations. He later went to Harvard Law School (The White House, 2021).

Donald Trump:

The 45th president, Donald Trump, served from 2017 to 2021. His career is the most unexpected one in comparison to all the other presidents ever elected. He was not a former vice president, nor governor, nor a Senator, nor a member of the House of Representatives, nor did he serve in the army. He had none of the qualities favoring the accession to the presidential seat. Regarding his personal life, he is a white man. He was 70 years old when he was elected. He went to college. He went to Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. He is more of a businessman than a politician (The White House, 2021).

Joe Biden:

The current president, Joe Biden, was elected in 2020. This makes him the 46th president of the United States. He was vice president under Barack Obama from 2009 to 2017. He was not governor, nor member of the House of Representatives, nor military veteran when elected. Though he was a U.S. Senator before becoming president. He is a white man who was 78 years old when elected. This makes him the oldest president ever. He went to college, and he graduated from the University of Delaware and Syracuse University Law School (The White House, 2021).

Kamala Harris:

Let us now compare Kamala Harris to these five presidents in order to see to what extent she was similar to them in 2020 and to see if any of these criteria could have been an impediment to her presidential ambitions.

Regarding **professional experience**, as mentioned previously, the past of the former presidents will be compared to the one of Kamala Harris. Since she ran in 2020, she will mainly be compared to 21st century presidents since it is more relevant for this analysis. She is thus compared to Bill Clinton (president from 1993 to 2001), George W. Bush (president from 2001 to 2009), Barack Obama (president from 2009 to 2017), Donald Trump (president from 2017 to 2021), and Joe Biden (president since 2021). The results which are here presented can be found in the comparative chart that follows.

As discussed in Section 3, Vice President Harris was an assistant District Attorney in California then she became District Attorney. Later in her life, she served as Attorney General of California, and then just before running for president, she had been elected California **Senator**. If we compare this path to the former experience seen in Section 2, we can see that Kamala Harris had the right past to become president. She was indeed Senator, like 37% of the former presidents were.

For the analysis of the **personal life** category, Kamala Harris is again compared to the previous presidents, particularly the 21st century presidents. The comparison concerns the race, the gender, the age, and the level of education of the candidate. The results which are presented here can be found in the comparative charts (see below, see Chart 1 and Chart 2).

Regarding her **race**, since Kamala's mom, Shyamala Gopalan is Indian and since Kamala's father, Donald Harris is Jamaican, it makes Kamala Harris Asian American from her mother's side and African American from her father's side. As seen before, 45 out of the 46 American Presidents were white, thus implying that being white increases one's chances of becoming president. So, through her origins and her race, Kamala Harris was less likely to be elected in 2020. Though it could have played an asset to her to represent minorities, which she tried to do. She fought a lot for the Black communities as explained in Section 3. She insisted on their rights, for example when she reacted to the death of George Floyd. Nevertheless, it appeared that she did not get minorities' votes. As explained by Dr. Altschuler, Biden was the one who got an overwhelming percentage of Black votes, not her. So, not only did she get the negative

side of racism, which is to have less of a chance of being elected as a Black person since white men are more likely to be elected president than people of color. But she also did not benefit from the positive side of her ethnicity, she did not appeal to Black people as much as she wished to.

Regarding **gender**, being a woman was one of Kamala Harris' natural assets to become vice president. because Biden promised to choose a woman as his running mate.

According to CCN, in its article 'The *final* Joe Biden VP rankings' published in early August, five women were in the running to become Vice President. This selection was revealed based on "conversations with knowledgeable sources" (CNN, 08/09/2020). Starting at the bottom of the table, the five women were Karen Bass, the Congresswoman from California, but her comments about Fidel Castro seem to have destroyed her chances of ever becoming vice president. Next was Tammy Duckworth, the senator from Illinois.

Then there was Gretchen Whitmer, the governor of Michigan, who was a favorite, but her handling of the coronavirus in her state had destroyed her chances of going further in the election. Susan Rice was fourth in line. She is the highest-ranking former United Nations ambassador in the Obama administration. Nevertheless, her involvement in the Benghazi attack, which was a terrorist attack that occurred in 2012 and directed against the U.S. special mission and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) annex in Benghazi, Libya, as explained by justice.gov (2020). In addition, there were emails to discuss the case of Michael Flynn in a private meeting between the president, the vice president, the then director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) James Comey, and Sally Yates who was deputy attorney general. Michael Flynn was Donald Trump's top campaign adviser and was about to become the national security adviser. These two scandals could have been used against her by Donald Trump if she had become Biden's running mate. This could have reduced Biden's chances of becoming president and, therefore, Rice's chances of being chosen as running mate.

The last woman on the list was, of course, Kamala Harris. It is said in the CNN article mentioned above that "she has the best combination of skills," expanding on her charisma, debate skills and background as some of her strengths (CNN, 08/09/2020).

Even though being a woman was a positive asset to become vice president, it constituted an impediment regarding her campaign to become president. In fact, when we take a look at all the presidents ever elected, as seen before, they are all men. Thus, being a woman is not

something electors are used to when they go voting and it may, therefore, be the reason why they are not likely to vote for women.

However, if we take a look at the 2016 presidential election, we see that Hillary Clinton had more popular votes than Donald Trump. So, even though she lost the election, it means that a majority of the American electors were and are ready to vote for a woman. They are also ready to have a woman for president. The fact that most Americans seem to be ready for a woman president is a point also mentioned by both Dr. Altschuler (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1) and the author Dan Morain (Interview Morain, 2022, see Appendix 2) in the interviews held in 2022. They both talked about the fact that some people will vote for a woman, especially because she would be the first female president. There are also people who would never vote for a woman due to their beliefs. But women will not especially vote for a woman and men will not especially vote for men. Being a woman was not an asset in the past, but, since 2016, we can begin to consider it as an advantage (according to Dr. Altschuler and Mr. Morain, see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

As for **age**, Kamala Harris was 56 years old when she campaigned to become president. She was right in the estimate average. When we look at the 21st century presidents, Bill Clinton was 46 years old when elected, which was 10 years younger than the average and, than Kamala Harris. George W. Bush was in the same age span than Harris since he was 54 years old when elected. Barack Obama was 47 years old when elected so younger than Harris. And the oldest presidents ever are former president Donald Trump, who was 70 years old when elected, and Joe Biden who was 78 years old when elected. So, with George W. Bush they were the only two who were next to the median age during their presidential election. The median age (56 years old) is the age Kamala Harris had in 2020 when she could have been elected since she was 56 in 2020. Even though the age does not seem to have an impact on the choice of the president, Kamala Harris was still on the average when she should have been elected had she won the 2020 election. This was a plus point for her in her campaign and would not have detracted from her chance of becoming president.

Regarding the **level of education**, Kamala Harris graduated from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. So, compared to the all the 21st century presidents, she too, got a bachelor's degree Moreover, she studied the most common degree among the presidents over time. She studied law, which gave her entry to the bar.

b) Comparison Chart – Kamala Harris vs. 21st Century Presidents

	Kamala Harris	Joe Biden	Donald Trump	Barack Obama	George W. Bush	Bill Clinton
Former vice president	X	V	X	X	X	X
Former governor	X	X	X	X	V (Texas)	V (Arkansas)
Former Senator	V	X	X	V	X	X
Former Member of the House of Representatives	X	X	X	X	X	X
Military Veteran	X	X	X	X	X	X

Chart 1: Comparison Kamala Harris and 21st century presidents regarding professional life (n=6)

	Kamala Harris	Joe Biden	Donald Trump	Barack Obama	George W. Bush	Bill Clinton
Race: Caucasian	X	V	V	X	V	V
Gender: men	X	V	V	V	V	V
Age: +/- 56 years	V (56)	X (78)	X (70)	X (47)	V (54)	X (46)
Level of education: college graduate	V	V	V	V	V	V
Level of education: went to law school	V	V	X	V	X	V

Chart 2: Comparison Kamala Harris and 21st century presidents regarding personal life (n=6)

2. Particularities of Kamala Harris' Campaign

The characteristics cited above are not the only things that played in the favor or disfavor for Kamala Harris. This is why this section investigates the difficulties that were uniquely faced by Kamala Harris in her 2020 U.S. presidential campaign. These are problems with which she was confronted, and which impeded her ascension to the office of president of the United States. Several impediments stand out. These impediments are Harris' funding issue, the constant comparisons made to Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the fact that she was said not to be a natural born citizen, the fact that she was facing Trump, and her inability to have clear fighting points. These points will be developed in order to answer the third research question which is to know to what extent issues affecting only Kamala Harris have been an impediment to her ascension to the office of president in 2020.

a) Funding Issue

Kamala Harris had funding issues during her 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign. According to OpenSecrets, Kamala Harris had three main sources of finances during her presidential campaign. The first one was Kamala Harris for the People which raised \$40.31M, of which \$40.1M had been spent. The second source was People Standing Strong which raised \$1.63M, of which \$1.63M had been spent. The last source, Fearless for the People raised \$358.82K and \$798.73K was spent. In total, the fundraising raised \$42.298,82M and \$42.528,73M was spent. So, she was in deficit, and her fundings were getting lower and lower through 2020 (OpenSecrets, 2020). In December 2019, Kamala Harris dropped out of the presidential race on the basis that she does not have the funds necessary to continue running her campaign. If one is not able to finance one's campaign, then it seems logical that the person drops the race. It is the official reason she gave when she dropped out of the presidential race. She sent an email to her team and supporters telling them that she stopped the race due to financial issues. This was her way to announce her choice. The funding issue is a reasonable reason to give up on a presidential race. Nevertheless, not having enough funds is always linked to some deeper problems. It is a point on which Dr. Altschuler agrees, especially when he explains that "money is a symptom. It is not the cause" (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1). In fact, he also said that lack of funds is "the reason someone drops out of the presidential race" (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1). But there are deeper reasons why you stop getting money. Why would people stop giving you money if everything is going fine with your campaign?

b) Comparisons to Presidents Obama and Biden

Kamala Harris is often associated to both former president Barack Obama and current president Joe Biden. This has had some negative effects for her and a negative impact on her campaign in 2020. Let us start with the comparisons to Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States who served from 2009 to 2017. Due to the fact that she is mixed race, it was assumed that she was close to Barack Obama, and that they shared opinions on numerous subject matters. Thus, she was often compared to Barack Obama during her 2020 presidential campaign. One of her nicknames was even the “L’Obama au féminin” (the female Obama) (Branaa, 2021: 175). This may have been detrimental to Kamala Harris in her presidential campaign. Indeed, with this association made, it may have been difficult for voters to detach themselves from the image, expectations, and opinions of Barack Obama when thinking of Kamala Harris. According to Branaa "C’est un point souvent repris dans les articles sur le parcours de Kamala Harris, car [le parcours de Donald Harris] rappelle celui du père de Barack Obama et a permis à beaucoup d’observateur de les comparer par ce biais", meaning that Donald Harris’ life is reminiscent of Barack Obama's father’s one and has allowed many observers to compare them in this way (Branaa, 2021: 40-41). Moreover, even though she is liked by the Obamas, the former president gave his support to his former vice president, Joe Biden, and not to Kamala Harris. Thus, not only did Harris not receive the support of the man she was compared to and attached to, but she also received the downside of being stuck with that comparison. She cannot be seen as her own person, but she is instead seen as the female version of Obama.

Furthermore, not only was she being compared to former President Barack Obama, but she was also being compared to current President Joe Biden. For Kamala Harris’ reputation, by being vice president, is entirely dependent on President Joe Biden's one. Since she accepted to be Biden’s running mate in his 2020 presidential campaign, she accepted to be undeniably associated to him and to all what he would do. If he makes mistakes, she is going to be associated with them. The thing with vice presidents is that they are associated with the president in case of policies implemented by the president which are received negatively by the population, but vice presidents will not get reward for the benefits to society. The president gets all the reward in case of success but shares his or her failures with his team, including his or her vice president. In consequence, this could affect her future career if she wants to run for president in 2024.

c) Not a Natural Born Citizen

One of the arguments made against Kamala Harris was developed by Wolverton (2020) in his article ‘Kamala Harris Is Not Qualified to Be (Vice) President, namely that she is constitutionally ineligible to run for president and therefore not eligible for vice president’ (2020), it says in the article that she is not a natural born citizen of the United States. As a reminder, there are three requirements to be eligible for the presidency or vice presidency in the United States; one of them is to be a natural born citizen. In fact, neither of her parents were naturalized at the time of her birth, thus making Harris a natural born American but not a natural born citizen since her parents were naturalized. (Wolverton, 2020) Although the article also points out that the term “birthright citizenship” is not even clearly defined by the Constitution, the Supreme Court or Congress. Therefore, the argument that Harris was ineligible did not have much impact since she was elected without any problems on this issue. Also, as Doctor Bruce Altschuler stated in the interview conducted (see Appendix 1) that Kamala Harris was born in California, which means that she is indeed an American citizen. If she could not become president because she would not be a citizen born in the United States, then Ted Cruz could not have been elected Senator from Texas since he was born in Cuba and his father is Cuban. Dr. Altschuler reminds that this is a tactic used a lot by former President Trump to try to discredit his opponents. For example, Trump had the same kind of rhetoric towards Barack Obama. Trump accused Barack Obama of not being an American citizen (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1).

d) Against Trump

The fact that the Democratic Party's opponents in the 2020 election were Donald Trump and Mike Pence was also a factor against Kamala Harris. Democrats needed someone who could beat Trump, and that was not an easy thing to find. As discussed with Dr. Bruce Altschuler, the Democratic Party needed someone who could steal Trump's votes without losing the Democrats' ones (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1). They could not let any detail diminish their chances of winning, because any lost vote could mean their defeat. It is a point that author Dan Morain also agrees with. He explains that Kamala Harris could have gotten more popular votes than Biden, but that she could not have had enough Electors to win. He points out that the only person who could have beaten Trump in 2020 was Joe Biden (Interview Morain, 2022, see Appendix 2). The fact that Kamala Harris is a Black woman, and an Asian American could have decreased the percentage of voters for the Democrats.

Since these three characteristics are linked to three types of discrimination, choosing Harris meant losing votes from people who discriminate against Blacks, Asian Americans, and women. Because of people's reluctance to see a woman, a Black person, or an Asian American running the country, these votes could have gone to the Republicans or kept people from voting in the first place. This was a risk that the Democrats did not want to take, given the unusual and unconventional nature of President Trump and his unpopularity within the Democratic Party.

e) No Clear Fighting Points

In her autobiography *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey* (2019), Harris says that she fights for many things. She is fighting, to begin with, for the LGBTQ+ community. She explains, for example, that she performed weddings in the hallway of City Hall when San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom allowed same-sex couples to marry in February 2004. After some twists and turns regarding the legality of same-sex marriages in California, Harris recalls, again in her autobiography, her first official and forever legal marriage of Kris Perry to Sandy Stier. This union had a big enough impact on Harris that she put a picture of the three of them during the wedding in her official autobiography (Harris, 2019: 111-118).

She also took on large banks like JPMorgan that were committing mortgage fraud at the time. She won the fight and ended up getting \$20 billion for homeowners who were victims of these fraudulent banks. So, she fought for the victims of bank fraud. (Harris, 2019: 75-108). She also created a program to reduce the recidivism rate of those just released from prison. This program, as mentioned earlier, is called Back on Track and was put together by Harris and one of her friends, Tim Silard, her policy chief. It was later adopted by the Obama Justice Department as a model program (Harris, 2019: 55-60). This was already the third line of struggle she had, and it did not end there.

She also set up a safe place for young girls who were victims of prostitution. The project began with her partner Norma Hotalin, a woman who had been arrested more than 30 times for prostitution but eventually got out and graduated from college. Harris raised funds, along with her partners, for the project and they also shut down the doors of three dozen brothels. Kamala Harris stated that she did not want the young victims to feel ashamed or guilty about what had happened to them because they were just victims (Harris, 2019: 30-37). She realized

at this time that the District Attorney's office was not working as well as it should, and her vision on this issue made her decide to run for the District Attorney in San Francisco (Harris, 2019: 1-37).

At this time, she also implemented truancy policies in elementary school to reduce the number of students skipping elementary school (Harris, 2019: 121-125). As said earlier, the program was successful, but it was still at odds with what she said when she talked about criminal injustices. Indeed, in her autobiography, she writes about criminal injustices that "the criminal justice system punishes people for being poor" (Harris, 2019: 65). Is it not what she did with her policies against skippers? She herself explained in her book that most skippers come from poor families with parents who cannot watch over them because they have to work all the time to make a living. But she still has policies in place that cost these poor families money, so she is kind of punishing people for being poor. If these families had not been poor, the parents might have been more attentive to their children's school attendance and their education.

Let us also not forget that she has always fought for civil rights, even from a young age, when she was sitting in her stroller when her parents were protesting for civil rights and Black rights. It is even said that she would stammer "Fweedom!" from her stroller (Branaa, 2021: 9-10). This commitment to Black people has not left her since then. She is still committed to racial equality. She went to Howard University, an HBCU, a Black university. And as Branaa says in his book "On ne peut pas ne pas prendre en compte cette aspiration viscérale pour la reconnaissance du peuple noir et la lutte pour l'égalité, qu'elle partageait avec son père." [We cannot ignore this visceral yearning for the recognition of Black people and the fight for equality, which she shared with her father.] (Branaa, 2021: 180). All of this shows her commitment to the Black community.

Here are two other issues she decided to speak out against. She spoke also out against police brutality. She even "made ours the first law enforcement agency in the state to require body cameras for its officers" (Harris, 219: 72) to combat police brutality and abuse. She also implemented implicit bias training for the

[f]ighting for families feeling the burden of stagnant wages, soaring housing costs, and diminishing opportunity; for people imprisoned in a broken criminal justice system; for students exploited by predatory lenders and burdened by skyrocketing tuition; for

victims of fraud and white-collar crime; for immigrant communities, for women, for older people (Harris, 2019: 142).

It is clear that Kamala Harris tried to juggle a wide variety of issues. This diversity leads to a lack of a distinctive theme, which was a crucial element she lacked when she ran for president in 2020, as Bruce Altschuler explained (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1). It seemed like she fought for everyone, but in doing so, she might not have been perceived as being fully committed to all of her fights. Nor could she get to the bottom of every issue she fought for. This could be disappointing for those affected by the issues. Without a clear, distinctive theme, voters were less likely to vote for her, because they struggled to identify her with policy objectives that were distinct from the other candidates.

3. Research Questions Answered

As mentioned above, this thesis sought to answer the following three research questions:

RQ1: How did Kamala Harris' professional past impact her chance of becoming president in 2020?

RQ2: Did she fit the qualities commonly associated with 21st century presidents?

RQ3: To what extent have issues affecting only Kamala Harris been an impediment to her ascension to the office of president in 2020?

Regarding the first research question, we have shown that she followed the right professional past to access the presidency. She had the same level of education as the majority of presidents. She went to university and got a bachelor's degree. She graduated from a law school, which is the most common degree among presidents of the United States. Moreover, she was Senator before running for president. This path is one that had been followed by more than 30% of the elected presidents (see Graph 3, p27). Even though she was not a governor, nor a Member of the House of Representatives, nor a former vice president (see Chart 1, p46), her experience as a Senator was still a great asset for her. The only experience that she could have had to increase her chances more was military service. So, she had what it takes to become president in 2020 regarding her professional past and professional experience. Her professional past was in no way an impediment in her 2020 campaign.

Regarding the second research question, we have seen that Kamala Harris shares almost all the qualities commonly associated with 21st presidents. She went to college. She graduated from law school. What is more, she was 56 years old when she could have started serving as

president. The only two characteristics which she was missing were being white and being a man. These two characteristics seem thus to be the two missing ones that lead to success. In consequence, being a Black woman and an Asian American seemed to have worked against Kamala Harris in her 2020 U.S. presidential campaign. If she had been a white man, then she may have become the 46th president of the United States.

Regarding the third research question, issues unique to Kamala Harris' campaign were a big impediment. If we look at the last two research questions, her professional life and her personal life were quite similar to the ones of the previous presidents. So, she fits most of the criteria cited above. This is why it seems that issues only affecting her must have been the strongest impediment in her pursuit of the presidency in 2020. As previously stated, these included her funding issues, and the constant comparison to President Obama and the fact that she was being associated with current president Biden. Plus, there was the challenge of facing off President Trump as well as accusations that she was not a natural born citizen. Finally, she also had no clear fighting points. All these elements played against her in quest of becoming the first Black woman as well as the first Asian American to ever be elected president.

Section 5: Discussion

The present thesis mainly focuses on the 2020 presidential election, but what about the next ones? Could Kamala Harris become president in 2024 or 2028? It is not so sure. A lot of factors will play a role in the next presidential elections, some of which have not appeared yet. For example, who would have thought that Ukraine would become a major political subject before 2022? Life, and especially political life, varies a lot, and it is almost impossible to predict victory for a particular potential candidate so long in advance. However, it is possible to imagine what kind of woman candidate may succeed in the future election, may it be in 2024 or 2028, or even later. Based on the research made and developed in this thesis, the woman candidate should have one of these professional paths. She should either have been a vice president, which would be the case of Kamala Harris now contrary to the 2020 election; or a Congresswoman (either a Senator or a Member of the House of Representatives), and/or she should be a military veteran. These are all the criteria which increase her chances of becoming the first female president in the history of the United States. However, as we saw that with Donald Trump, it is not to be excluded that an unconventional candidate, let us say a female Trump, wins the election.

Again, based on the framework established earlier, certain aspects of her personal life may help her get to the most important job in the U.S. The female candidate has more chances of winning if she is a Caucasian woman, if she is around 56 years old when elected, if she went to college and if she studied law. These are all paths helping to get elected but it does not mean that if a woman fulfills all of these qualities that she will undoubtedly be elected president. The criteria hereabove exposed are only helps.

If we, once again, look at Kamala Harris under these criteria, she fulfills most of them, as explained earlier. She also ticks one more box, as she will have been vice president for the next election. This means that her chances of being elected increase. Nevertheless, she will still have her personal issues and her impediments which will still play against her. Unless she positions herself clearly on issues such as the death penalty and picks her battles (she cannot fight everything even though she wishes she could), she will not be higher on the potential president ranking, be it for 2024 or later.

As explained briefly earlier, her reputation is also linked to Biden's presidency, if he held, at the end, a positive presidency with which the Americans are satisfied, then Kamala's chances and public opinion are better. On the contrary, if people are dissatisfied with Biden, then Kamala Harris' chances drops. Moreover, Harris' potential campaign also depends on Biden on another level, if he decides to run for a second term, then she cannot run in 2024. So, regarding the 2024 elections, it depends on Biden's wish. Since he is already the oldest president ever, and the fact that he said he would only do one term at the beginning of his campaign, Vice President Harris is more than likely to be able to run in 2024. Nevertheless, if we follow Mr. Morain's opinion, it is likely that Biden will run again in 2024, despite what Biden said, even though Mr. Morain would not "bet his house on that" (Interview Morain, 2022, see Appendix 2). If Biden decides not to run in 2024, Harris could start as the front runner because she is vice president, and this could be a huge help for her, since it means that she could collect money earlier than the others, thus reducing her funding issue. Though it does not mean that she would not have to fight for victory, even within her party. As said by Mr. Morain, "[t]here is a sexist issue here that she has to overcome" (Interview Morain, 2022, see Appendix 2) anyway, even if she wins the popular vote as Hillary Clinton did, the most important is for her to win the most electors as possible. However, it is still too early to be sure of Biden's possible running for reelection. We need to wait to see if Joe Biden presents himself again in 2024 before making any further assumptions. It is also too early to even predict whether or not Kamala Harris will want to run for president in 2024.

Another point that was briefly talked about earlier but that is still relevant here is the alternation of republican and democrat presidents. As explained earlier, it seems to be a trend to elect a republican president and then a democrat president since George H. W. Bush, president from 1989 to 1993. So, if a democrat woman or Kamala Harris wants to run for president, she may be more likely to succeed if she waits till 2028 or 2032 if Biden is elected once again. Or she could be more likely to win after a republican president, whether it be in 2028, 2032 or even later.

To conclude this discussion, there is no lost hope for a woman to be elected president in the next election, but her professional past and her personal experience can give a pretty good indication as to whether or not she is more likely or less likely to be elected in 2024. Thus, Kamala Harris' chances of becoming president in 2024 or later are increased compared to the

previous election. Someone with Kamala Harris' typical professional experience and personal background, who, contrary to Harris, is Caucasian and who does not have all her unique weaknesses, has greater chances of being elected than Kamala Harris. We thus may have the first woman president of the United States soon. At least it is the opinion of Dr. Altschuler, since he thinks that most Americans are ready to have a woman president (Interview Altschuler, 2022, see Appendix 1). Mr. Morain seems more sceptic about this since he emphasizes several times the fact that people can be sexist and that there is a sexist issue that needs to be overcome around a female president (Interview Morain, 2022, see Appendix 2). If Americans were only looking at the popular vote, then Hillary Clinton would have become president in 2016. So, we argue that the U.S.A. are likely to have their first female president soon.

However, political issues and political life change pretty quickly, so it may be a little too early to predict anything. There may be huge change or huge concerns arising before 2024 which could change everything regarding the prospects of a woman being elected or any candidate being elected. Or, as it happened with Barack Obama in 2008, a new candidate barely known before the election may win all support and become the new president that no one was expecting. Demographics are also changing quickly. Since votes depend on demographics, the 2024 election may surprise us all by who becomes the president for the following four years.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to find out the answer to the question “Did Kamala Harris have what it takes to become elected president in 2020?”. To answer this main question, three research questions had been established. The first one concerned the impact of Harris’ professional past on her chances of becoming president. The second question referred to the qualities associated with 21st century presidents and the extent to which Kamala Harris fulfilled or not these qualities. The last question focused on Kamala Harris and her unique issues.

To answer these three questions, a framework had been established. Kamala Harris had thus been analyzed in terms of her professional past in comparison to the ones of the 21st century presidents. It turns out that being a former vice president, a governor, a Member of Congress (whether being a Senator or a Member of the House of Representatives), or a military veteran increases a candidate’s chances of becoming president. So, Harris’ professional past was in no way an impediment in her 2020 campaign as she was a Senator before running for president. She had favorable past experience to win the election.

The qualities analyzed to answer the second question referred to the personal life and background of Kamala Harris and 21st century presidents. The criteria analyzed were the race, the gender, the age, the level of education and if they went to law school. It turns out that all presidents were men, all but one (Barack Obama, president from 2009 to 2017) were white, that the median age was of 56 years old when elected and that most of them went to college, mostly to study law. Based on this, Kamala Harris, once again places well in 2020. Except for the fact that she is a Black woman, she fulfilled all the other criteria since she went to law school and was 56 years old when she could have been elected.

The problems unique faced by Kamala Harris which were analyzed in this thesis concerned her funding issue, the constant comparison to former President Barack Obama and current President Joe Biden, the attack about the fact that she was not a natural born citizen, her facing Donald Trump, and the absence of clear fighting points. All these aspects were huge impediments. The fact that she was lacking money probably was the result of the other aspects since someone is not funded anymore when funders stop believing in that person. Were she not compared to two presidents, were she not facing Trump, and were she fighting clear issues, could she have win in 2020? There are too many conditions to be able to assess a

viable answer. She would have had more chances than she had, that is sure, but it is not certain that Americans would have had elected her.

To conclude, throughout this master's thesis it is argued that despite the qualities showed by Kamala Harris in her 2020 presidential campaign, she could not have won the election. She could not have won due to issues that only her was facing. Her past professional experience could not have been an impediment since it was quite similar to the previous candidates' path. Since these candidates became presidents, these are considered the 'right' paths to become president. The only two elements of her personal life which could have played against her were that she was a woman and that she was not Caucasian. Since Barack Obama (president from 2009 to 2017) was elected and since he was an African American, the race factor can be excluded from Harris' situation. If we take a look at the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton, a woman, won the popular vote, she 'just' did not distribute her votes well enough to win the majority of the electors. Thus, this implies that a woman could be elected by Americans, at least, most of the Americans could vote for a woman. The only thing needed would be to distribute one's vote well enough to get more than half of the electors.

Future Research:

This thesis needs to be filled with more research. To assess the findings developed here, some research for the 2024 and 2028 elections is needed. These would prove if what was found in these pages was at the end an accurate prediction or not.

Moreover, as this is only a master's thesis, some more aspects could also have been considered, but I had to limit myself. Some aspects such as the charisma, the way the candidates talk to the audience, the good mood of the candidates, etc. are all aspects which play a role in the election of a president. Unfortunately, these were too subjective for me to analyze in this thesis. A deep search into all these subjective criteria and an application to Kamala Harris in her 2020 campaign may reveal other results than the one showed here.

Another search that could improve this thesis is looking more deeply into the social networks and the posts which were made by and about Kamala Harris during her campaign. As said earlier, social media are taking more and more space in politics, this is why analyzing the communication made on these platforms could also explain why Kamala Harris was not funded anymore at some point, and why she was not the winner in 2020.

Broader research that could be made concerns the place of women in politics. Could a woman become president in the United States in the 21st century or is it a utopia? If this is just a utopia and if Americans are not ready to have a woman run their country, then this thesis would have no use as it would mean that Kamala Harris had no chances from the start. She had not a chance of winning from the day of her birth. Luckily, the two men who were interviewed, whether it be Dr. Altschuler or Mr. Morain (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) were quite positive about the idea of having a female president. This gives hope. But since these are not scientifically research but only points of view, some serious research could put some light on this burning question.

To end up this thesis, I would only like to say that I wish a woman will soon be elected president and that I would not give up any hopes so soon for 2024 since a lot can still change. Today will influence tomorrow. If Americans want to have a woman elected, they need to change now, or at least to make things change today because: "*The future depends on what we do in the present.*" - Mahatma Gandhi (Sanvello, 2022). The only way to get further and to evolve is to change.

Ceux qui n'ont pas compris le passé,
Ceux qui n'ont pas compris le passé de l'humanité en général,
Ceux qui n'ont pas compris leur propre passé en particulier,
Ceux-là seront condamnés à le reproduire.¹⁵
Bernard Werber, *Nous les Dieux*

¹⁵ Those who have not understood the past,
Those who have not understood the past of humanity in general,
Those who have not understood their own past in particular,
Those will be condemned to reproduce it.

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