

# Kamala Harris

**Kamala Devi Harris** (/ˈkɑːmələ/ *KAH-mə-lə*<sup>[1]</sup><sup>[2]</sup> born October 20, 1964)<sup>[3]</sup> is an American politician and lawyer who has served as the junior United States senator from California since 2017. She is the presumptive Democratic vice presidential nominee in the 2020 election.

Born in Oakland, California, Harris is a graduate of Howard University and the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. She began her career in the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, before being recruited to the San Francisco District Attorney's Office and later the City Attorney of San Francisco's office. In 2003, she was elected district attorney of San Francisco. She was elected attorney general of California in 2010, and re-elected in 2014.

She defeated Loretta Sanchez in the 2016 Senate election to become California's third female senator as well as the second African-American woman, and the first South Asian American, to serve in the United States Senate.<sup>[4]</sup><sup>[5]</sup> As a senator, she has supported healthcare reform, federal descheduling of cannabis, a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, the DREAM Act, a ban on assault weapons, and progressive tax reform. She gained a national profile for her pointed questioning of Trump administration officials during Senate hearings.<sup>[6]</sup>

Harris ran for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination and attracted national attention before ending her campaign on December 3, 2019.<sup>[7]</sup> She was announced as former vice president Joe Biden's running mate in the 2020 election on August 11, 2020. She is the first African-American, the first Asian-American, and the third female vice presidential running mate on a major party ticket after Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 and Sarah Palin in 2008.<sup>[8]</sup><sup>[9]</sup><sup>[10]</sup>

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#### United States senator from California

##### Incumbent

##### Assumed office

January 3, 2017

Serving with Dianne Feinstein

**Preceded by** Barbara Boxer

#### 32nd Attorney General of California

##### In office

January 3, 2011 – January 3, 2017

**Governor** Jerry Brown

**Preceded by** Jerry Brown

**Succeeded by** Xavier Becerra

#### 27th District Attorney of San Francisco

##### In office

January 8, 2004 – January 3, 2011

**Preceded by** Terence Hallinan

**Succeeded by** George Gascón

#### Personal details

**Born**  Kamala Devi Harris  October 20, 1964  Oakland, California, U.S.

**Political party** Democratic

**Spouse(s)** Douglas Emhoff (m., 2014)

## **Attorney General of California (2011–2017)**

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Official

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|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Parents</b>   | <u>Donald J. Harris</u><br><u>Shyamala Gopalan</u>  |
| <b>Relatives</b> | <u>Maya Harris</u> (sister)<br><u>Meena Harris</u> (niece)<br><u>P. V. Gopalan</u><br>(grandfather) |
| <b>Education</b> | <u>Howard University</u> (BA)<br><u>University of California, Hastings</u> (JD)                     |
| <b>Signature</b> |                  |
| <b>Website</b>   | <u>Campaign website</u> ( <a href="http://kamalaharris.org">http://kamalaharris.org</a> )           |

## **Early life and education**

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Kamala Devi Harris was born on October 20, 1964, in Oakland, California.<sup>[3]</sup> Her mother, Shyamala Gopalan, was a breast cancer scientist who had emigrated from Tamil Nadu, India, in 1960 to pursue a doctorate in endocrinology at UC Berkeley.<sup>[11]</sup> Her father, Donald J. Harris, is a Stanford University emeritus professor of economics, who emigrated from British Jamaica in 1961 for graduate study in economics at UC Berkeley.<sup>[12][13]</sup>

Harris was raised in Berkeley, California, with her younger sister, Maya Harris.<sup>[14][15]</sup> As a child, Harris lived briefly on Milvia Street in central Berkeley, and then her family moved to the upper floor of a duplex on Bancroft Way in West Berkeley, an area often called "the flatlands",<sup>[16]</sup> which had a significant Black population.<sup>[17]</sup>

When she began kindergarten, she was bused as part of Berkeley's comprehensive desegregation program to Thousand Oaks School, a public primary school in a more prosperous neighborhood in northern Berkeley<sup>[16]</sup> which previously had been 95 percent white, and after the desegregation plan went into effect became 40 percent Black.<sup>[17]</sup>

Harris grew up going to both a Black Baptist church and a Hindu temple.<sup>[18]</sup> She and her sister visited their mother's family in Madras (now Chennai), India, on occasion.<sup>[18]</sup> She also visited her father's family in Jamaica.<sup>[19]</sup>

Her parents divorced when she was seven; she has said that when she and her sister visited their father in Palo Alto on weekends, neighbors' kids were not allowed to play with them because they were black.<sup>[18]</sup> When she was 12, Harris and her sister moved with their mother to Montreal, Canada, where their mother had accepted a research position at Jewish General Hospital and teaching at McGill University.<sup>[20]</sup> Harris attended a French speaking middle school, Notre-Dame de Grâce,<sup>[21]</sup> and then the Westmount High School in Westmount, Quebec, graduating in 1981.<sup>[22]</sup>

After high school, Harris attended Howard University, a historically black university in Washington, D.C. While at Howard, she interned as a mail room clerk for California senator Alan Cranston, chaired the economics society, led the debate team and joined Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.<sup>[23][24]</sup> Harris graduated from Howard in 1986 with a double-major Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and economics.

Harris then returned to California to attend law school at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law through its Legal Education Opportunity Program for students from adverse backgrounds.<sup>[25]</sup> While at UC Hastings, she served as president of its chapter of the Black Law Students Association.<sup>[26]</sup> She graduated with a Juris Doctor in 1989,<sup>[27]</sup> and was admitted to the California Bar in June 1990.<sup>[28]</sup>

## **Early career (1990–2004)**

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In 1990, Harris was hired as a deputy district attorney in Alameda County, California, where she was noted as being "an able prosecutor on the way up".<sup>[29]</sup> In 1994, California Assembly speaker Willie Brown (with whom Harris was in a relationship)<sup>[29]</sup> appointed Harris to the state Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board and later the California Medical Assistance Commission. Harris took a leave of absence from her prosecutor job to serve in the positions.<sup>[29][30]</sup>

In February 1998, San Francisco district attorney Terence Hallinan recruited Harris as an assistant district attorney.<sup>[31]</sup> There, she became the chief of the Career Criminal Division, supervising five other attorneys, where she prosecuted homicide, burglary, robbery, and sexual assault cases – particularly Three-Strikes cases. Harris reportedly clashed with Hallinan's assistant, Darrell Salomon<sup>[32]</sup> over Proposition 21, which would have granted prosecutors the option of trying juvenile defendants in Superior Court rather than juvenile courts.<sup>[33]</sup> Harris campaigned against the measure and Salomon opposed directing media inquiries about Proposition 21 to Harris and reassigned her, a *de facto* demotion. Harris filed a complaint against Salomon and quit.<sup>[34]</sup>



Harris's childhood home on Bancroft Way in Berkeley



Harris was bused to Thousand Oaks School

In August 2000, Harris took a new job at San Francisco City Hall, working for City Attorney Louise Renne.<sup>[35]</sup> Harris ran the Family and Children's Services Division representing child abuse and neglect cases. Renne said of Harris: "She will make the best DA this city has seen in years."<sup>[36]</sup>

## 2003 campaign for District Attorney

In 2002, she began preparing to run against Hallinan, calling Mark Buell, the stepfather of her friend Summer Tompkins Walker, and telling him of her intentions.<sup>[37]</sup> Buell offered to be her finance chair and advised she would need to raise more than \$150,000 to defeat an incumbent, the highest amount ever raised for the position. He and Harris organized a finance committee composed mostly of Harris's friends, including Vanessa Getty and Susan Swig.<sup>[37]</sup>

Harris sought to run a campaign that disrupted negative stereotypes of black women and set up her campaign office in Bayview, the "most isolated neighborhood" in San Francisco.<sup>[37]</sup> Running against Hallinan, and defense attorney Bill Fazio, Harris was the least known candidate, but noted to be "whip-smart, hard-working, and well-credentialed".<sup>[38]</sup> Harris's campaign successfully lobbied the 24-member Central Committee – including U.S. senator Dianne Feinstein and then-House majority leader Nancy Pelosi – of the statewide Democratic party to withhold its influential endorsement from an incumbent.<sup>[36]</sup> Hallinan and Fazio sought to portray Harris as a crony of Willie Brown, who was campaigning and fundraising for Harris, through a PAC.<sup>[36]</sup> Harris denied financially benefitting from Brown, and countered that statements used to tie her to Brown were misogynistic.<sup>[36]</sup>



Harris in 2004 with California Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, who later twice became Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

In October 2003, the San Francisco Ethics Commission found that Harris unintentionally<sup>[39]</sup> violated the city's campaign finance law by exceeding the voluntary \$211,000 spending limit. In what was thought to be the largest fine to date under that law, the Ethics Commission levied up to \$34,000 in penalties and corrective measures, and ordered her to buy newspaper ads informing voters that she had exceeded the spending limit. Harris accepted full blame, saying, "Leadership isn't about being perfect. Leadership means taking responsibility."<sup>[39]</sup> Harris spent nearly \$625,000 while Hallinan spent just over \$285,000; both advanced to the general election runoff with 33 percent and 37 percent of the vote, respectively.<sup>[40]</sup>

Hallinan was running for re-election amidst the backdrop of the Fajitagate scandal, in which three off-duty police officers got into a fight with residents over a bag of fajitas. Hallinan alleged that Prentice E. Sanders, the city's first black chief of police, and other officers were involved in a cover-up of the criminal acts of the three off-duty officers, indicting all of them for obstruction of justice in February 2003. Sanders resigned, but Hallinan was forced to drop the charges against Sanders less than a month later when he was unable to prove evidence of a conspiracy.<sup>[41]</sup> Sanders pursued legal action and was declared factually innocent, damaging Hallinan's credibility.<sup>[42]</sup>

In the runoff, Harris pledged never to seek the death penalty and to prosecute three-strike offenders only in cases of violent felonies.<sup>[43]</sup> Harris ran a "forceful" campaign, assisted by former mayor Willie Brown, Senator Dianne Feinstein, writer and cartoonist Aaron McGruder, and comedians Eddie Griffin and Chris Rock.<sup>[44][45]</sup> Harris differentiated herself from Hallinan by attacking his performance.<sup>[46]</sup> She argued that she left his office because it was technologically inept and "dysfunctional", emphasizing his "abysmal" 52 percent conviction rate for serious crimes despite an 83 percent average conviction rate statewide.<sup>[47]</sup> She accused Hallinan of mismanaging his office by promoting people in his office without merit and covering up allegations of prosecutorial misconduct.<sup>[48]</sup> Harris further charged that his office wasn't doing enough to stem

the city's gun violence, particularly in poor neighborhoods like the Bayview and the Tenderloin, and attacked his willingness to accept plea bargains in cases of domestic violence: "It is not progressive to be soft on crime."<sup>[49][50]</sup>

Harris won with 56 percent of the vote, becoming California's first American district attorney of color.<sup>[40]</sup>

## District Attorney of San Francisco (2004–2011)

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### Public safety

#### Felony conviction rate

Just prior to Harris taking office the felony conviction rate was 50 percent;<sup>[51]</sup> by 2009 it was 76 percent.<sup>[52]</sup> Convictions of drug dealers increased from 56 percent in 2003 to 74 percent in 2006.<sup>[53][52]</sup>

Harris was ran unopposed in 2007.<sup>[54]</sup>

#### Non-violent crimes

In summer 2005, Harris created an environmental crimes unit,<sup>[55]</sup> which charged two printing company employees with dumping hazardous printing ink in the Bayview neighborhood;<sup>[56][57]</sup> the two men pleaded guilty and received probation.<sup>[57]</sup>

In 2007, Harris and city attorney Dennis Herrera investigated San Francisco supervisor Ed Jew for violating residency requirements necessary to hold his supervisor position;<sup>[58]</sup> Harris charged Jew with nine felonies, alleging that he lied under oath and falsified documents to make it appear that he resided in a Sunset District home, necessary so he could run for the District 4 seat for supervisor.<sup>[59]</sup> Jew pleaded guilty in October 2008 to unrelated federal corruption charges (mail fraud, soliciting a bribe, and extortion)<sup>[59]</sup> and pleaded guilty the following month in state court charge of perjury for lying about his address on nomination forms, as part of a plea agreement in which the other state charges were dropped and Jew agreed to never again hold elected office in California.<sup>[60]</sup> Harris described the case as "about protecting the integrity of our political process, which is part of the core of our democracy."<sup>[60]</sup> For his federal offenses, Jew was sentenced to 64 months in federal prison and a \$10,000 fine;<sup>[61]</sup> for the state perjury conviction, Jew was sentenced to one year in county jail, three years' probation, and about \$2,000 in fines.<sup>[62]</sup>

Under Harris, the D.A.'s office obtained more than 1,900 convictions for marijuana offenses, including persons simultaneously convicted of marijuana offenses and more serious crimes.<sup>[63]</sup> The rate at which Harris's office prosecuted marijuana crimes was higher than the rate under her predecessor, but the number of defendants sentenced to state prison for such offenses was substantially lower as compared to her predecessor.<sup>[63]</sup> Prosecutions for low-level marijuana offenses were rare under Harris, and her office had a policy of not pursuing jail time for marijuana possession offenses.<sup>[63]</sup> Harris's successor as D.A., George Gascón, expunged all San Francisco marijuana offenses going back to 1975.<sup>[63]</sup>

#### Violent crimes



Harris as San Francisco District Attorney

In the early 2000s, the City and County of San Francisco murder rate per capita drastically outpaced the national average. Within the first six months of taking office, Harris cleared 27 of 74 backlogged homicide cases by settling 14 by plea bargain and taking 11 to trial; with 9 convictions and 2 hung juries, she attained an 81 percent success rate. She took 49 violent crime cases to trial and secured 36 convictions, for an 84 percent success rate.<sup>[64]</sup> From 2004 to 2006, Harris achieved an 87 percent conviction rate for homicides and a 90 percent conviction rate for all felony gun violations.<sup>[65]</sup>

Harris also pushed for higher bail for criminal defendants involved in gun-related crimes, arguing that historically low bail encouraged outsiders to commit crimes in San Francisco. SFPD officers credited Harris with tightening loopholes in bail and drug programs that defendants had used in the past.<sup>[66]</sup> In addition to creating a gun crime unit, Harris opposed releasing defendants on their own recognizance if they were arrested on gun crimes, sought minimum 90-day sentences for possession of concealed or loaded weapons, and charged all assault weapons possession cases as felonies, adding that she would seek prison terms for criminals who possessed or used assault weapons and would seek maximum penalties on gun-related crimes.<sup>[67]</sup>

If you carry an illegal gun in the city of San Francisco and your case is brought to my office, you are going to spend time in jail. Period.<sup>[67]</sup>

In April 2005, Harris pursued the prosecution of Charles Rothenberg, a.k.a. Charley Charles, under California's three strikes law for illegal possession of a firearm. Rothenberg became infamous in the 1980s when he set his 6-year-old son, Dave Dave, on fire amidst a custody dispute with his ex-wife. Rothenberg previously served 6½ years in prison for dousing the hotel room in kerosene and setting it ablaze while his son was asleep. Having been convicted of attempted murder and arson, and now illegal firearm possession, Rothenberg's act constituted a third "strike" under state law, triggering a sentence of 25 years to life in prison.<sup>[68]</sup>

In May 2005, convicted sex offender Roberto Gamero broke into a home in the Ingleside district and sexually assaulted a nine-year-old. Gamero was arrested on charges of aggravated sexual assault of a child, child molestation, false imprisonment, and burglary and later sentenced to more than 17 years in prison.<sup>[69][70]</sup> That summer, Harris's office brought three charges of murder with special circumstances against LaShaun Harris, who was seen throwing her young sons – ages 2, 6, and 16 months – into the San Francisco Bay.<sup>[71]</sup> LaShaun Harris, who has paranoid schizophrenia, pleaded not guilty to three counts, stating that she had heard “the voice of God” telling her to “sacrifice” her children.<sup>[72][71]</sup> A jury found her guilty of second-degree murder, but the judge ruled that she was insane and ordered her hospitalized for 25 years to life.<sup>[73]</sup> The conviction was upheld on appeal.<sup>[74]</sup>

Kamala Harris created a special Hate Crimes Unit, focusing on hate crimes against LGBT children and teens in schools.<sup>[75]</sup> In early 2006, Gwen Araujo, a 17-year-old American Latina transgender teenager, was murdered by two men who later used the "gay panic defense" before being convicted of second-degree murder. Harris, alongside Araujo's mother Sylvia Guerrero, convened a two-day conference of at least 200 prosecutors and law enforcement officials nationwide to discuss strategies to counter such legal defenses.<sup>[76]</sup> Harris subsequently supported A.B. 1160, the Gwen Araujo Justice for Victims Act, advocating that California's penal code include jury instructions to ignore bias, sympathy, prejudice, or public opinion in making their decision, also making mandatory for district attorney's offices in California to educate prosecutors about panic strategies and how to prevent bias from affecting trial outcomes.<sup>[77]</sup> In September 2006, California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed A.B. 1160 into law; the law put California on record as declaring it contrary to public policy for defendants to be acquitted or convicted of a lesser included offense on the basis of appeals to "societal bias".<sup>[77][78]</sup>

In August 2007, state assemblyman Mark Leno introduced legislation to ban gun shows at the Cow Palace, joined by Harris, Police Chief Heather Fong, and Mayor Gavin Newsom. City leaders contended the shows were directly contributing to the proliferation of illegal guns and spiking homicide rates in San Francisco: Mayor Newsom earlier that month signed into law local legislation banning gun shows on city and county property. Leno alleged that merchants drove through the public housing developments nearby and illegally sold weapons to residents.<sup>[79]</sup> While the bill would stall, local opposition to the shows continued until the Cow Palace Board of Directors in 2019 voted to approve a statement banning all future gun shows.<sup>[80]</sup>

## Reform efforts

### Recidivism and re-entry initiative

In 2004, Harris recruited civil rights activist Lateefah Simon, the youngest woman to ever receive a MacArthur Fellowship, to create San Francisco Reentry Division.<sup>[81]</sup> The flagship program was the Back on Track initiative, a first-of-its-kind reentry program for first-time nonviolent offenders age 18–30. Initiative participants whose crimes were not weapon or gang-related would plead guilty in exchange for a deferral of sentencing and regular appearances before a judge over a 12 to 18-month period. The program maintained rigorous graduation requirements, mandating completion of up to 220 hours of community service, obtaining a high-school-equivalency diploma, maintaining steady employment, taking parenting classes, and passing drug tests. At graduation, the court would dismiss the case and expunge the graduate's record.<sup>[82]</sup> Over six years, Harris's pioneer program produced over 200 graduates, and achieved a low recidivism rate of less than 10 percent, compared to 53 percent of California's drug offenders that returned to prison within two years of release. Back on Track earned recognition from the U.S. Department of Justice as a model for reentry programs. The DOJ found that the cost to the taxpayers per participant was markedly lower (\$5,000) than the cost of adjudicating a case (\$10,000) and housing a low-level offender (\$50,000).<sup>[83]</sup> In 2009, a state law (the Back on Track Reentry Act, A.B. 750) was enacted, encouraging other California counties to start similar programs.<sup>[84][85]</sup> Adopted by the National District Attorneys Association as a model, prosecutor offices in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Atlanta have used Back on Track as a template for their own programs.<sup>[86][87][88]</sup>

### Death penalty

During her campaign Harris pledged never to seek the death penalty.<sup>[43]</sup> After San Francisco Police Department officer Isaac Espinoza was shot and killed on duty in 2004, US Senator (and former San Francisco mayor) Dianne Feinstein,<sup>[89]</sup> US senator Barbara Boxer, and Oakland mayor Jerry Brown pressured Harris to reverse that position.<sup>[90]</sup> Public polling found that 70 percent of city voters backed Harris's decision not to seek the death penalty, with 22 percent opposed.<sup>[91]</sup> Harris's convictions were tested again in the case of Edwin Ramos, an illegal immigrant and alleged MS-13 gang member, who was accused of murdering Tony Bologna and his two sons.<sup>[92]</sup> On September 10, 2009, she announced she would seek life in prison without the possibility of parole, a decision Mayor Gavin Newsom backed.<sup>[93]</sup>

Harris has expressed the belief that life without possibility of parole is a better, more cost-effective, punishment.<sup>[94]</sup> According to the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, the death penalty costs \$137 million per year.<sup>[95]</sup> If the system were changed to life without possibility of parole, the annual costs would be approximately \$12 million per year.<sup>[95]</sup> She noted that the resulting surplus could put 1,000 more police officers into service in San Francisco alone.<sup>[94]</sup>

### Truancy initiative

In 2006, as part of an initiative to reduce the city's skyrocketing homicide rate, Harris led a city-wide effort to combat truancy for at-risk elementary school youth in San Francisco.<sup>[96]</sup> Declaring chronic truancy a matter of public safety and pointing out that the majority of prison inmates and homicide victims are dropouts or habitual truants, Harris's office met with thousands of parents at high-risk schools and sent out letters warning all families of the legal consequences of truancy at the beginning of the fall semester, adding she would prosecute the parents of chronically truant elementary students; penalties included a \$2,500 fine and up to a year in jail.<sup>[97]</sup> The program was controversial when introduced.

In 2008, Harris issued citations against six parents whose children missed at least 50 days of school, the first time San Francisco prosecuted adults for student truancy. San Francisco's school chief, Carlos Garcia, stated that the path from truancy to prosecution was lengthy, and that the school district usually spends months encouraging parents through phone calls, reminder letters, private meetings, hearings before the School Attendance Review Board, and offers of help from city agencies and social services; two of the six parents entered no plea but said they would work with the DA's office and social service agencies to create "parental responsibility plans" to help them start sending their children to school regularly.<sup>[98]</sup> By April 2009, there were 1,330 elementary school students who were habitual or chronic truants, down 23 percent from 1,730 in 2008, and down from 2,517 in 2007 and from 2,856 in 2006.<sup>[99]</sup> Harris's office prosecuted seven parents in three years, with none jailed.<sup>[99]</sup>

## **Attorney General of California (2011–2017)**

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### **2010 election**

On November 12, 2008, Harris announced her candidacy for California attorney general. Both of California's senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, House speaker Nancy Pelosi, United Farm Workers cofounder Dolores Huerta, and Mayor of Los Angeles Antonio Villaraigosa all endorsed her during the primary.<sup>[100]</sup> In the June 8, 2010 primary, she was nominated with 33.6 percent of the vote, defeating Alberto Torrico and Chris Kelly.<sup>[101]</sup>

In the general election, she faced Republican Los Angeles County district attorney Steve Cooley, who led most of the race. Cooley ran as a nonpartisan, distancing himself from the Meg Whitman campaign. The election was held November 2 but after a protracted period of counting mail-in and provisional ballots, Cooley conceded on November 25.<sup>[102]</sup> Harris was sworn in January 3, 2011 as the first African-American, first Asian-American, and first woman to serve as California attorney general.<sup>[103]</sup>



Official Attorney General portrait

### **2014 election**

Harris announced her intention to run for re-election in February 2014 and filed paperwork to run on February 12.<sup>[104]</sup> The Sacramento Bee,<sup>[105]</sup> Los Angeles Daily News,<sup>[106]</sup> and Los Angeles Times endorsed her for re-election.<sup>[107]</sup>

On November 4, 2014, Harris was re-elected against Republican Ronald Gold, winning 57.5 percent of the vote to 42.5 percent.<sup>[108]</sup>

### **Significant cases and policies**



## Anti-truancy efforts

In 2011, Harris urged criminal penalties for parents of truant children as she did as District Attorney of San Francisco, allowing the court to defer judgment if the parent agreed to a mediation period to get their child back in school. Critics charged that local prosecutors implementing her directives were overzealous in their enforcement and that Harris's policy adversely affected some families.<sup>[109]</sup> In 2013, Harris issued a report titled "In School + On Track", which found that more than 250,000 elementary school students in the state were "chronically absent" and that the statewide truancy rate for elementary students in the 2012–2013 school year was nearly 30 percent, at a cost of nearly \$1.4 billion to school districts, since funding is based on attendance rates.<sup>[110]</sup>



Visiting Peterson Middle School in 2010

## Law enforcement accountability

In 2015, Harris conducted a 90-day review of implicit bias and lethal use of force. In April 2015, Harris introduced the first of its kind "*Principled Policing: Procedural Justice and Implicit Bias*" training, designed in conjunction with Stanford University psychologist and professor Jennifer Eberhardt, to help law enforcement officers overcome barriers to neutral policing and rebuild the relationship of trust between law enforcement and the community. All Command-level staff received the training. The training was part of a package of reforms introduced within the California Department of Justice, which also included additional resources deployed to increase the recruitment and hiring of diverse special agents, an expanded role for the department to investigate officer-related shooting investigations, and community policing.<sup>[111]</sup> In 2015, Harris's California Department of Justice was the first statewide agency in the country to require all of its police officers to wear body cameras.<sup>[112]</sup> That same year, Harris announced a new state law requiring every law enforcement agency in California to collect, report, and publish expanded statistics on how many people are shot, seriously injured or killed by peace officers throughout the state.<sup>[113]</sup>

Later that year, Harris appealed a judge's order to take over the prosecution of a high-profile mass murder case and to eject all 250 prosecutors from the Orange County district attorney's office over allegations of misconduct by Republican D.A. Tony Rackauckas. Rackauckas was alleged to have illegally employed jailhouse informants and concealed evidence.<sup>[114]</sup> Harris noted that it was unnecessary to ban all 250 prosecutors from working on the case, as only a few had been directly involved, later promising a narrower criminal investigation. The U.S. Department of Justice began an investigation into Rackauckas in December 2016, but he was not re-elected.<sup>[115]</sup>

In 2016, Harris announced a patterns and practices investigation into purported civil rights violations and use of excessive force by the two largest law enforcement agencies in Kern County, California, the Bakersfield Police Department and the Kern County Sheriff's Department.<sup>[116]</sup> Labeled the "deadliest police departments in America" in a five-part Guardian expose, a separate investigation commissioned by the ACLU and submitted to the California Department of Justice corroborated reports of police using excessive force. The ACLU found that officers had engaged in patterns of excessive force – including shooting and beating to death unarmed individuals – as well as a practice of filing retaliatory criminal charges against individuals subjected to excessive force. Further analysis also revealed the highest rate of police homicides in the country, as well as excessive use of force, resulting in 17 deaths of unarmed civilians from 2009 to 2013 in the form of dog attacks and tazings.<sup>[117]</sup>

## Criminal justice reform

## Launch of Division of Recidivism Reduction and Re-Entry

In November 2013, Harris launched the California Department of Justice's Division of Recidivism Reduction and Re-Entry in partnership with district attorney offices in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Alameda County.<sup>[118]</sup> In March 2015, Harris announced the creation of a pilot program in coordination with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department called "Back on Track LA". Like Back on Track, first time, nonviolent offenders between 18 and 30 individuals participated in the pilot program for 24–30 months. Assigned a case manager, participants received education through a partnership with the Los Angeles Community College District and job training services.<sup>[119]</sup>

## Sentencing and prison inmate retention

After the 2011 United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Plata* declared California's prisons so overcrowded that they inflicted cruel and unusual punishment, Harris fought federal court supervision, explaining "I have a client, and I don't get to choose my client."<sup>[120]</sup> Harris's record on wrongful conviction cases as attorney general has engendered some criticism from academics and activists. Law professor Lara Bazelon contends Harris "weaponized technicalities to keep wrongfully convicted people behind bars rather than allow them new trials."<sup>[121]</sup> Harris declined to take any position on criminal sentencing-reform initiatives Proposition 36 (2012) and Proposition 47 (2014), arguing it would be improper because her office prepares the ballot booklets. John Van de Kamp, a predecessor as attorney general, publicly disagreed with the rationale.<sup>[120]</sup>

In September 2014, attorneys for Harris argued unsuccessfully in a court filing against the early release of prisoners, citing the need for inmate firefighting labor. When the memo provoked headlines, Harris spoke out against the memo. She said that she was unaware of it, and the attorneys had produced the memo without her knowledge.<sup>[122]</sup> Since the 1940s, qualified California inmates have the option of volunteering to receive comprehensive training from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection in exchange for sentence reductions and more comfortable prison accommodations; prison firefighters receive about \$2 a day, and another \$1 when battling fires.<sup>[123]</sup>

## Death penalty

In 2014, Judge Cormac J. Carney vacated the death sentence of convicted rapist and murderer Ernest Dwayne Jones, declaring capital punishment in California unconstitutional on the basis of the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment because "systemic delay and dysfunction" rendered the process arbitrary.<sup>[124]</sup> Harris appealed, contending Carney failed to abide by the highly-circumscribed habeas corpus procedure set forth in the binding Supreme Court precedent of *Teague v. Lane* prohibiting federal courts from announcing a new rule of constitutional law in *habeas* cases.<sup>[125]</sup> In an op-ed for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, legal and political scholar Mugambi Jouet criticized the appeal as a defense of the death penalty.<sup>[124]</sup> The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Harris when it unanimously overturned Carney's order.<sup>[126]</sup>

## Consumer protection

### Fraud, waste, and abuse

In 2011, Harris announced the creation of the Mortgage Fraud Strike Force in the wake of the 2010 United States foreclosure crisis.<sup>[127]</sup> That same year, Harris obtained two of the largest recoveries in the history of California's False Claims Act – \$241 million from Quest Diagnostics and then \$323 million from the SCAN healthcare network – over excess state Medi-Cal and federal Medicare payments.<sup>[128][129]</sup>

In 2012, Harris leveraged California's economic clout to obtain better terms in the National Mortgage Settlement against the nation's five largest mortgage servicers – JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Citigroup and Ally Bank.<sup>[130]</sup> The mortgage firms were accused of illegally foreclosing on homeowners. After dismissing an initial offer of \$2 to \$4 billion in relief for Californians, Harris withdrew from negotiations. The offer eventually was increased to \$18.4 billion in debt relief and \$2 billion in other financial assistance for California homeowners.<sup>[131][132]</sup>



Harris meets foreclosure victims in 2011.

In 2013, Harris worked with Assembly speaker John Pérez and Senate president *pro tem* Darrell Steinberg in 2013 to introduce the Homeowner Bill of Rights, considered one of the strongest protections nationwide against aggressive foreclosure tactics.<sup>[133]</sup> The Homeowner Bill of Rights banned the practices of "dual-tracking" (processing a modification and foreclosure at the same time) and robo-signing and provided homeowners with a single point of contact at their lending institution.<sup>[134]</sup> Harris achieved multiple nine-figure settlements for California homeowners under the bill mostly for robo-signing and dual-track abuses, as well as prosecuting instances in which loan processors failed to promptly credit mortgage payments, miscalculated interest rates, and charged borrowers improper fees. Harris secured hundreds of millions in relief, including \$268 million from Ocwen Financial Corporation, \$470 million from HSBC, and \$550 million from SunTrust Banks.<sup>[135][136][137]</sup>

From 2013 to 2015, Harris pursued financial recoveries for California's public employee and teacher's pensions, CalPERS and CalSTRS against various financial giants for misrepresentation in the sale of mortgage-backed securities. She secured multiple nine-figure recoveries for the state pensions, recovering about \$193 million from Citigroup, \$210 million from S&P, \$300 million from JP Morgan Chase, and over half a billion from Bank of America.<sup>[138][139][140][141]</sup>

In 2013, Harris declined to authorize a civil complaint drafted by state investigators that accused OneWest Bank, owned by an investment group headed by future U.S. treasury secretary Steven Mnuchin (then a private citizen), of "widespread violation" of California foreclosure laws.<sup>[142]</sup> During the 2016 elections, Harris was the only Democratic Senate candidate to receive a donation from Mnuchin, but voted against his confirmation as treasury secretary in February 2017. In 2019, Harris's campaign stated that the decision not to pursue prosecution hinged on the state's inability to subpoena OneWest. Her press secretary said, "There was no question OneWest conducted predatory lending, and Senator Harris believes they should be punished. Unfortunately, the law was squarely on their side and they were shielded from state subpoenas because they're a federal bank."<sup>[143]</sup>

In 2014, Harris forced rent-to-own retailer Aaron's, Inc. to refund \$28.4 million to California customers and pay \$3.4 million in civil penalties to settle allegations that it violated California's Karnette Rental-Purchase Act by charging improper late fees, overcharging customers who paid off contracts early, and omitting important contract disclosures.<sup>[144]</sup> Aaron's also violated California state privacy laws by permitting its franchised stores to install spyware on rented computers, allowing franchisees to remotely monitor keystrokes, capture screenshots, and even activate the webcam.<sup>[144]</sup> According to a report on the industry by the National Consumer Law Center, nearly all rent-to-own customers have a household income of below \$50,000, and the vast majority are people of color who have attained a high school education or less.<sup>[145]</sup>

In 2015, Harris obtained a \$1.2 billion judgment against for-profit post-secondary education company Corinthian Colleges for false advertising and deceptive marketing targeting vulnerable, low-income students and misrepresenting job placement rates to students, investors, and accreditation agencies.<sup>[146]</sup> The Court ordered Corinthian to pay \$820 million in restitution and another \$350 million in civil penalties.<sup>[147]</sup> That same year, Harris also secured a \$60 million settlement with JP Morgan Chase to resolve allegations of illegal

debt collection with respect to credit card customers, with the bank also agreeing to change practices that violated California consumer protection laws by collecting incorrect amounts, selling bad credit card debt, running a debt collection mill that "robo-signed" court documents without first reviewing the files as it rushed to obtain judgments and wage garnishments. As part of the settlement, the bank was required to stop attempting to collect on more than 528,000 customer accounts<sup>[148]</sup>

In 2015, Harris opened an investigation of the Office of Ratepayer Advocates, San Diego Gas and Electric, and Southern California Edison regarding the closure of San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. California state investigators searched the home of California utility regulator Michael Peevey and found hand written notes that allegedly showed that he had met with an Edison executive in Poland, where the two had negotiated the terms of the San Onofre settlement, leaving San Diego taxpayers with a \$3.3 billion bill to pay for the closure of the plant. The investigation was closed amidst Harris's 2016 run for the U.S. Senate position.<sup>[149][150]</sup>

## Privacy rights

In February 2012, Harris announced an agreement with six technology giants and their app developers – Apple, Amazon, Google, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, and Research in Motion – to mandate that apps sold in their stores display prominent privacy policies that inform users of the private information they're sharing and with whom.<sup>[151]</sup> Facebook later joined the agreement. That summer, Harris announced the creation of a Privacy Enforcement and Protection Unit to enforce laws related to cyber privacy, identity theft, and data breaches.<sup>[152]</sup> That winter, Harris sent a letter to 100 mobile-app developers, notifying them of their non-compliance with state privacy laws and asking them to create privacy policies or face a \$2500 fine each time a non-compliant app is downloaded by a resident of California.<sup>[153]</sup>

In 2015, Harris secured two settlements with Comcast, one totaling \$33 million over allegations that posted online the names, phone numbers and addresses of tens of thousands of customers who had paid for unlisted voice over internet protocol ("VOIP") phone service and another \$26 million settlement to resolve allegations that it discarded paper records without first omitting or redacting private customer information.<sup>[154][155]</sup> Harris also settled with Houzz over allegations the company recorded phone calls without notifying customers or employees. Houzz was forced to pay \$175,000, destroy the recorded calls, and hire a chief privacy officer, the first time such a provision has been included in a settlement with the California Department of Justice.<sup>[156]</sup>

## LGBT rights

### Opposing Prop 8

In 2008, California voters passed Prop 8, a California ballot proposition and state constitutional amendment providing that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California". Legal challenges to Prop 8 were presented by opponents soon after its approval, and a pair of same-sex couples filed a lawsuit against the initiative in federal court in the case of Perry v. Schwarzenegger (later Hollingsworth v. Perry). In August 2010, Chief Judge Vaughn Walker ruled that the amendment was unconstitutional under both the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment,<sup>[157]</sup> since it purported to *re-remove* rights from a disfavored class only, with no rational basis. The official proponents' justifications for the measure were analyzed in over fifty pages covering eighty findings of fact. The state government supported the ruling and refused to defend the law.<sup>[158]</sup> In their 2010 campaigns, California attorney general Jerry Brown and Harris both ran on platforms promising not to defend the proposition.<sup>[159]</sup> After being elected, Harris declared her office would not defend the marriage ban, leaving the task to Prop 8's proponents.<sup>[160]</sup>

On February 7, 2012, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, in a 2–1 decision, reached the same conclusion as the district court, but on narrower grounds. The court ruled that it was unconstitutional for California to grant marriage rights to same-sex couples, only to take them away shortly after. The ruling was stayed pending appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>[161]</sup> The Supreme Court of the United States granted certiorari that December, ordering the parties to brief and argue the additional question of whether supporters of Prop. 8 have standing, i.e., a legal right to be involved in the case, under Article III, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>[161]</sup> On February 27, 2013, Harris filed an amicus curiae brief, arguing that Prop 8 was unconstitutional and that the initiative's sponsors did not have legal standing to represent California's interests by defending the law in federal court.<sup>[162]</sup>

On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court, in a 5–4 decision, ruled that the proponents did not possess legal standing in their own right to defend Prop 8 in federal court, either to the Supreme Court or (previously) to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Therefore, the Court vacated the decision of the Ninth Circuit, and remanded the case for further proceedings. The decision left the district court's 2010 ruling intact.<sup>[163]</sup> The next day, Harris, in a speech delivered in downtown Los Angeles, declared that all 58 counties in California must abide by Judge Walker's 2010 ruling that declared Prop 8 unconstitutional, urging the Ninth Circuit to lift the ban on same-sex marriages as soon as possible – even before the usual 25-day waiting period until the Supreme Court clerk notified the lower court of its judgement.<sup>[164]</sup> On June 28, 2013, the Ninth Circuit, on remand, dismissed the appeal for lack of jurisdiction and dissolved their previous stay of Judge Walker's ruling, enabling Governor Jerry Brown to order same-sex marriages to resume.<sup>[165]</sup> The same day, Kristin Perry and Sandra Stier, plaintiffs in the case, married with Harris officiating the ceremony.<sup>[166]</sup>

### **Michelle-Lael B. Norsworthy v. Jeffrey Beard et. al.**

In February 2014, Michelle-Lael Norsworthy, a transgender woman incarcerated at California's Mule Creek State Prison, filed a federal lawsuit based on the state's failure to provide her with what she argued was medically necessary sex reassignment surgery (SRS).<sup>[167]</sup> In April 2015, a federal judge ordered the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to provide Norsworthy with SRS, finding that prison officials had been "deliberately indifferent to her serious medical need."<sup>[168][169]</sup> Harris, representing CDCR, challenged the order in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.<sup>[170]</sup> She argued that "any 'disappointment' Ms. Norsworthy might feel at the denial could be assuaged with psychotherapy",<sup>[171]</sup> "Norsworthy has been receiving hormone therapy for her gender dysphoria since 2000 and continues to receive hormone therapy and other forms of treatment", and "there is no evidence that Norsworthy is in serious, immediate physical or emotional danger."<sup>[172]</sup> Harris later claimed that "it was their policy", and that she "got them to change the policy".<sup>[173]</sup> In August 2015, while the state's appeal was pending, Norsworthy was released on parole, obviating the state's duty to provide her with inmate medical care<sup>[174]</sup> and rendering the case moot.<sup>[175]</sup>

## **Public safety**

### **Environmental protection**

Harris prioritized environmental protection as attorney general, first securing a comprehensive \$44 million settlement to resolve all natural resource damages, penalties, and response costs associated with the 2007 Cosco Busan oil spill, where a container ship collided with the Delta Tower of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge and spilled more than 50,000 gallons of bunker fuel into the San Francisco Bay in 2011.<sup>[176]</sup> In the aftermath of the 2015 Refugio oil spill, which deposited about 140,000 gallons of crude oil off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, Harris toured the coastline and directed her office's resources and attorneys to investigate possible criminal violations.<sup>[177]</sup> Thereafter, operator Plains All American Pipeline was indicted on 46 criminal charges related to the spill, with one employee indicted on 3 criminal charges.<sup>[178]</sup> In 2019, a

Santa Barbara jury returned a verdict finding Plains guilty of failing to properly maintain its pipeline and another eight misdemeanor charges; they were sentenced to pay over \$3 million in fines and assessments.<sup>[179]</sup>

From 2015 to 2016, Harris secured multiple multimillion-dollar settlements with fuel service companies Chevron, BP, ARCO, Phillips 66, and ConocoPhillips to resolve allegations they failed to properly monitor the hazardous materials in its underground storage tanks used to store gasoline for retail sale at hundreds of California gas stations.<sup>[180][181][182]</sup> In summer 2016, automaker Volkswagen AG agreed to pay up to \$14.7 billion to settle a raft of claims related to so-called "defeat devices" used to cheat emissions standards on its diesel cars while actually emitting up to 40 times the levels of harmful nitrogen oxides allowed under state and federal law.<sup>[183]</sup> Harris and the chair of the California Air Resources Board, Mary D. Nichols, announced that California would receive \$1.18 billion as well as another \$86 million paid to the state of California in civil penalties.<sup>[183]</sup>



Attorney General Kamala Harris tours oil spill cleanup efforts.

## Law enforcement

California's Proposition 69 mandated law enforcement to collect DNA samples from any adult arrested for a felony and from individuals arrested for certain crimes. In 2012, Harris announced that the California Department of Justice had improved its DNA testing capabilities such that samples stored at the state's crime labs could now be analyzed four times faster, within 30 days. Accordingly, Harris reported that her Rapid DNA Service Team within the Bureau of Forensic Services cleared California's entire DNA backlog for the first time in history, having developed a process that allowed higher volume analysis of 5,400 evidence samples – an increase of 11 percent from 2010 (4,800) and 24 percent from 2009 (4,100).<sup>[184]</sup> In April 2014, Harris's team was honored with the U.S. Department of Justice's Award for Professional Innovation in Victim Services.<sup>[185]</sup> Harris's office would later be awarded a \$1.6 million grant from the Manhattan District Attorney's initiative to eliminate the backlogs of untested rape kits.<sup>[186]</sup>



AG Harris touring the Fresno Regional DNA Laboratory

In 2014, Harris introduced OpenJustice, a criminal justice data initiative designed with professor Steven Raphael making available statewide data on arrest rates, deaths in law enforcement custody, arrest-related deaths, and law enforcement deaths. Subsequent improvements to the platform revealed data pertaining to clearance rates and racial disparities in the criminal justice system.<sup>[187]</sup>

## Sex crimes

In 2011, Harris obtained a guilty plea and a four-year prison sentence from a stalker who used Facebook and social engineering techniques to illegally access the private photographs of women whose social media accounts he hijacked. Harris commented that the Internet had "opened up a new frontier for crime".<sup>[188]</sup> Later that year, Harris created the eCrime Unit within the California Department of Justice, a 20-attorney unit specifically targeting technology crimes.<sup>[189]</sup> In 2015, several purveyors of so-called "revenge porn" sites based in California were arrested, charged with felonies, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms.<sup>[190][191]</sup> In the first prosecution of its kind in the United States, Kevin Bollaert was convicted on 21 counts of identity theft and six counts of extortion and sentenced to 18 years in prison.<sup>[192]</sup> Harris brought up these cases when California Congresswoman Katie Hill was targeted for similar cyber exploitation by her ex-husband and forced to resign in late 2019.<sup>[193]</sup>

In 2016, Harris announced the arrest of Backpage CEO Carl Ferrer on felony charges of pimping a minor, pimping, and conspiracy to commit pimping. The arrest warrant alleged that 99 percent of Backpage's revenue was directly attributable to prostitution-related ads, many of which involved victims of sex trafficking, including children under the age of 18.<sup>[194]</sup> The pimping charge against Ferrer was dismissed by the California courts in 2016 on the grounds of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, but in 2018 Ferrer pleaded guilty in California to money laundering and agreed to give evidence against the former co-owners of Backpage.<sup>[195]</sup> Ferrer simultaneously pleaded guilty to charges of money laundering and conspiracy to facilitate prostitution in Texas state court and Arizona federal court.<sup>[195][196]</sup> Under pressure, Backpage announced that it was removing its adult section from all of its U.S. sites.<sup>[197]</sup> Harris welcomed the move, saying, "I look forward to them shutting down completely."<sup>[198]</sup> The investigations continued after she became a senator, and, in April 2018, Backpage and affiliated sites were seized by federal law enforcement.<sup>[196]</sup>

## Transnational criminal organizations

In early 2011, Harris ordered the arrest of three men with ties to the Tijuana Cartel suspected of plotting to murder a family in San Diego, seizing two assault weapons, more than 1000 rounds of ammunition, and \$20,000 in cash.<sup>[199]</sup> Later that year, Harris ordered three coordinated law enforcement sweeps in Contra Costa County, the Central Valley, and San Bernardino County, resulting in hundreds of gang leader arrests of Nuestra Familia, Norteños, and the Vagos Motorcycle Club. Law enforcement officers also seized vast quantities of methamphetamine, cash, and illegal firearms, including an anti-tank gun and a rocket launcher.<sup>[200][201][202]</sup>



AG Harris announces the arrest of 101 gang members in Los Banos, California.

In summer 2012, Harris signed an accord with the attorney general of Mexico, Marisela Morales, to improve coordination of law enforcement resources targeting transnational gangs engaging in the sale and trafficking of human beings across the San Ysidro border crossing. The accord called for closer integration on investigations between offices and sharing best practices.<sup>[203]</sup> In September 2012, Harris announced that Governor Jerry Brown had signed into law two bills she sponsored to combat human trafficking.<sup>[204]</sup> In November, Harris presented a report titled "The State of Human Trafficking in California 2012" at a symposium attended by U.S. secretary of labor Hilda Solis and Attorney General Morales, outlining the growing prevalence of human trafficking in the state, and highlighting the involvement of transnational gangs in the practice.<sup>[205][206]</sup>

In early 2014, Harris issued a report titled, "Gangs Beyond Borders: California and the Fight Against Transnational Crime",<sup>[207]</sup> addressing the prominent role of drug, weapons, and human trafficking, money laundering, and technology crimes employed by various drug cartels from Mexico, Armenian Power, 18th Street Gang, and MS-13 and offering recommendations for state and local law enforcement to combat the criminal activity.<sup>[208]</sup> Later that year, Harris led a bipartisan delegation of state attorneys general to Mexico City to meet with their Mexican counterparts to discuss joint efforts to address transnational crime, culminating in the signing of a letter of intent with the Comisión Nacional Bancaria y de Valores and establishing a bi-national working group on enforcement of money laundering.<sup>[209]</sup> Following the visit to Mexico City, Harris convened a summit focused on the use of technology to fight transnational organized crime with state and federal officials from the U.S., Mexico, and El Salvador, including Attorney General of Mexico Jesus Murillo Karam and Attorney General of El Salvador Luis Martinez.<sup>[210]</sup>

In 2015, Harris ordered the arrest of 75 individuals in Merced County and 52 individuals in Tulare County affiliated with the Norteños.<sup>[211][212]</sup> Harris's office also broke up a massive identity theft and tax fraud scam perpetrated by Crips in Long Beach, CA. 32 members were arrested on charges that included 283 counts of

criminal conspiracy, 299 counts of identity theft, and 226 counts of grand theft, amounting to over \$3.3 million stolen by an identity theft scheme and \$11 million stolen by a tax fraud scheme.<sup>[213]</sup>

In 2016, Harris announced wide-sweeping arrests of over 50 members of the Mexican Mafia, a.k.a. La Eme, seizing more than 60 firearms, more than \$95,000 in cash, and \$1.6 million worth of methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana in Riverside County.<sup>[214]</sup> Later that year, Harris's office coordinated with federal agents in a raid on dozens of businesses in the Los Angeles Fashion District operating as a major money-laundering hub for narcotics traffickers in Mexico, arresting nine people on charges of money laundering through a black market peso exchange scheme and seizing nearly \$65 million in illegal proceeds.<sup>[215]</sup>

## Obama appointment speculation

During Obama's presidency, Harris was mentioned as a possible nominee for U.S. attorney general.<sup>[216]</sup> Harris publicly stated she was not interested in the job.<sup>[217]</sup>

After the death of Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia in 2016, Harris was speculated to be his replacement as an associate justice of the Supreme Court.<sup>[218]</sup> However, as her campaign had already begun, Harris publicly stated she was only interested in running for the U.S. Senate and did not wish to be considered.<sup>[219]</sup>



Kamala Harris with U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder

## U.S. Senate (2017–present)

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### 2016 election

After 24 years as California's junior senator, Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) announced her intention to retire from the United States Senate at the end of her term in 2016. Harris was the first candidate to declare her intention to run for Boxer's senate seat. Harris officially announced the launch of her campaign on January 13, 2015.<sup>[220]</sup> Harris was a top contender from the beginning of her campaign: weeks after she announced her campaign, a survey by Public Policy Polling showed her leading in a hypothetical match-up against Los Angeles mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, 41 percent to 16 percent.<sup>[221]</sup> Current and former statewide elected officials John Chiang, John Garamendi, Bill Lockyer, Gavin Newsom, and Alex Padilla declined to run.<sup>[222][223][224][225]</sup>



In February 2016, the California Democratic Party voted at its convention to endorse Harris, who received nearly 80 percent of the vote.<sup>[226]</sup> Three months later, Governor Jerry Brown endorsed her.<sup>[227]</sup>

In the June 7 primary, Harris came in first with 40 percent of the vote and won by pluralities in most counties.<sup>[228]</sup> On July 19, President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden endorsed Harris.<sup>[229]</sup>

Harris faced congresswoman, and fellow Democrat, Loretta Sanchez, in the general election.<sup>[230]</sup> It was the first time a Republican did not appear in a general election for the Senate since California began directly electing senators in 1914.<sup>[231]</sup> In the November 2016 election, Harris defeated Sanchez, capturing over 60 percent of the vote, carrying all but four counties.<sup>[232]</sup> Following her victory, she promised to protect immigrants from the policies of President-elect Donald Trump and announced her intention to remain Attorney General through the end of 2016.<sup>[233][234]</sup>



## 2017

On January 28, after Trump signed Executive Order 13769, barring citizens from several Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S. for 90 days, she condemned the order and was one of many to describe it as a "Muslim ban".<sup>[235]</sup> She called White House chief of staff John F. Kelly at home to gather information and push back against the executive order.<sup>[236]</sup>

In February, Harris spoke in opposition to Trump's cabinet picks Betsy DeVos, for Secretary of Education,<sup>[237]</sup> and Jeff Sessions, for United States attorney general.<sup>[238]</sup> In early March, she called on Sessions to resign, after it was reported that Sessions spoke twice with Russian ambassador to the United States Sergey Kislyak.<sup>[239]</sup>

In April, Harris voted against the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>[240]</sup> Later that month, Harris took her first foreign trip to the Middle East, visiting California troops stationed in Iraq and the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, the largest camp for Syrian refugees.<sup>[241]</sup>

In June, Harris garnered media attention for her questioning of Rod Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, over the role he played in the May 2017 firing of James Comey, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.<sup>[242]</sup> The prosecutorial nature of her questioning caused Senator John McCain, an *ex officio* member of the Intelligence Committee, and Senator Richard Burr, the committee chairman, to interrupt her and request that she be more respectful of the witness. A week later, she questioned Jeff Sessions, the attorney general, on the same topic.<sup>[243]</sup> Sessions stated that her questioning "makes me nervous". Burr's singling out of Harris sparked suggestion in the news media that his behavior was sexist, with commentators arguing that Burr would not treat a male Senate colleague in a similar manner.<sup>[244]</sup>

In December, Harris called for the resignation of Senator Al Franken, asserting on Twitter, "Sexual harassment and misconduct should not be allowed by anyone and should not occur anywhere."<sup>[245]</sup> Twelve months later, longtime aide Larry Wallace resigned from Harris's Senate staff after *The Sacramento Bee* uncovered a \$400,000 settlement paid by the State of California for Wallace's sexual harassment of his executive assistant while both worked in Harris's Attorney General office.<sup>[246]</sup>

## 2018

In January, Harris was appointed to the Senate Judiciary Committee after the resignation of Al Franken.<sup>[247]</sup> Later that month, Harris questioned Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen for favoring Norwegian immigrants over others and claiming to be unaware that Norway is a predominantly white country.<sup>[248]</sup>

In April and May, Harris questioned Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg for Facebook's misuse of users' data and whistleblower Christopher Wylie on reports that Cambridge Analytica misappropriated the data from 87 million Facebook users to suppress the votes of African Americans and the extent to which Facebook violated the privacy of its users.<sup>[249][250]</sup>

In May, Harris heatedly questioned Secretary Nielsen about the Trump administration family separation policy, under which children were separated from their families when the parents were taken into custody for illegally entering the U.S.<sup>[251]</sup> In June, after visiting one of the detention facilities near the border in San Diego,<sup>[252]</sup>



Harris at the Sorek Desalination Plant in Israel



Harris in Selma, 2018

Harris became the first senator to demand Nielsen's resignation.<sup>[253]</sup>

In the September and October, Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court confirmation hearings, Harris questioned Brett Kavanaugh about a meeting he may have had regarding the Mueller Investigation with a member of Kasowitz Benson Torres, the law firm founded by the President's personal lawyer Marc Kasowitz. Kavanaugh was unable to answer and repeatedly deflected.<sup>[254]</sup> Harris also participated in questioning the FBI director's limited scope of the investigation on Kavanaugh regarding allegations of sexual assault.<sup>[255]</sup> She joined her colleagues in voting against his confirmation.

Harris was a target of the October 2018 United States mail bombing attempts.<sup>[256]</sup>

In December, the Senate passed the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act (S. 3178), sponsored by Harris.<sup>[257]</sup> The bill, which died in the House, would have made lynching a federal hate crime.<sup>[258]</sup>

## 2019

On March 22, Harris called for U.S. attorney general William Barr to testify before Congress about Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation after he submitted his report on Russian interference in the 2016 election. "We need total transparency here," Harris said.<sup>[259]</sup> Two days later, Barr released a 4-page "summary" of the redacted Mueller Report, which was criticized as a deliberate mischaracterization of its conclusions.<sup>[260]</sup> Later that month, Harris was one of twelve Democratic senators to sign a letter led by Mazie Hirono that questioned the decision of Attorney General Barr to offer "his own conclusion that the President's conduct did not amount to obstruction of justice" and called for an investigation into whether Barr's summary of the Mueller Report and his April 18 news conference were misleading.<sup>[261]</sup>



Harris at SF Pride Parade  
2019

On May 1, 2019, Barr testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee.<sup>[262]</sup> During the hearing, Barr remained defiant about the misrepresentations in the four-page summary he had released ahead of the full report.<sup>[263]</sup> Harris asked Barr if he had reviewed the underlying evidence before deciding not to charge the President with obstruction of justice. Barr admitted that neither he, Rod Rosenstein, nor anyone in his office reviewed the evidence supporting the report before making the charging decision.<sup>[264]</sup> Harris then asked: "Has the President or anyone at the White House ever asked or suggested that you open an investigation of anyone? Yes or no, please, sir." Barr hesitated, and asked to repeat the question before answering "Yeah, but I'm trying to grapple with the word 'suggest,' There have been discussions of matters out there that they have not asked me to open an investigation, but --". Harris later called for Barr to resign, adding that he refused to answer her questions because he could open himself up to perjury.<sup>[265]</sup> Later that day, Harris said Barr's responses to her questions disqualified him from serving as U.S. attorney general.<sup>[266]</sup> Two days later, Harris demanded again that the Department of Justice inspector general Michael E. Horowitz investigate whether Attorney General Barr acceded to pressure from the White House to investigate his political enemies.<sup>[267]</sup>

In December, Harris led a group of Democratic senators and civil rights organizations in demanding the removal of White House senior adviser Stephen Miller after emails published by the Southern Poverty Law Center revealed frequent promotion of white nationalist literature to Breitbart website editors.<sup>[268]</sup>

## 2020

Before the opening of the impeachment trial of Donald Trump on January 16, 2020, Harris delivered remarks on the floor of the Senate, stating her views on the integrity of the American justice system and the principle that nobody is above the law:

We now face a choice: will we insist that we have one system of justice that applies equally to all? Or will we continue to have two systems of justice, in which some are above the law? ... The Senate is charged with deciding whether the President of the United States, with all of his power and supposed wealth, will be held accountable for his actions – or whether we will finally live up to the principle: 'Equal Justice Under Law.'



Harris with Congressional Black Caucus women

Harris later asked Senate Judiciary chairman Lindsey Graham to halt all judicial nominations during the impeachment trial, to which Graham acquiesced.<sup>[269][270]</sup> Harris voted to convict the president on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.<sup>[271]</sup>

Harris has worked on bipartisan bills with Republican co-sponsors, including a bail reform bill with Senator Rand Paul,<sup>[272]</sup> an election security bill with Senator James Lankford,<sup>[273]</sup> and a workplace harassment bill with Senator Lisa Murkowski.<sup>[274]</sup> Other Republican senators working with Harris on the Senate Intelligence Committee, including Marco Rubio, Richard Burr, and Roy Blunt, have also praised her as "well-prepared", "effective", and "a quick study".<sup>[275]</sup> Lindsey Graham said of Harris: "She's hard-nosed. She's smart. She's tough."<sup>[276]</sup>

Harris voted against Senator Bernie Sanders' amendment to reduce the size of the \$740 billion National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021.<sup>[277]</sup>

## Committee assignments

Harris is a member of the following committees:<sup>[278]</sup>

- Committee on the Budget
- Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
  - Subcommittee on Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management
  - Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management
- Select Committee on Intelligence
- Committee on the Judiciary<sup>[279]</sup>
  - Subcommittee on the Constitution
  - Subcommittee on Oversight, Agency Action, Federal Rights and Federal Courts
  - Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law

## Caucus memberships

- Congressional Black Caucus<sup>[280]</sup>
- Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus<sup>[281]</sup>
- Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues

# 2020 presidential election

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## Presidential campaign

Harris had been considered a top contender and potential frontrunner for the 2020 Democratic nomination for President.<sup>[282]</sup> In June 2018, she was quoted as "not ruling it out".<sup>[283]</sup> In July 2018, it was announced that she would publish a memoir, a sign of a possible run.<sup>[284]</sup> On January 21, 2019, Harris officially announced her candidacy for President of the United States in the 2020 United States presidential election.<sup>[285]</sup> In the first 24 hours after her candidacy announcement, she tied a record set by Bernie Sanders in 2016 for the most donations raised in the day following an announcement.<sup>[286]</sup> Over 20,000 people attended her formal campaign launch event in her hometown of Oakland, California, on January 27, according to a police estimate.<sup>[287]</sup>

During the first Democratic presidential debate in June 2019, Harris scolded former vice president Joe Biden for "hurtful" remarks he made, speaking fondly of Senators who opposed integration efforts in the 1970s and working with them to oppose mandatory school bussing.<sup>[288]</sup> Harris's support rose by between 6 and 9 points in polls following that debate.<sup>[289]</sup> In the second debate in August, Harris was confronted by Biden and Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard over her record as Attorney General.<sup>[290]</sup> The San Jose Mercury News assessed that some of Gabbard's and Biden's accusations were on point, such as blocking the DNA testing of a death row inmate, while others did not stand up to scrutiny. In the immediate aftermath, Harris fell in the polls following that debate.<sup>[291][292]</sup> Over the next few months her poll numbers fell to the low single digits<sup>[293]</sup> At a time when liberals were increasingly concerned about the excesses of the criminal justice system, Harris faced criticism from reformers for tough-on-crime policies she pursued while she was California's attorney general. For example, in 2014, she decided to defend California's death penalty in court.<sup>[294]</sup>

On December 3, 2019, Harris withdrew from seeking the 2020 Democratic nomination, citing a shortage of funds.<sup>[295]</sup> In March 2020, Harris endorsed Joe Biden for president.<sup>[296]</sup>

## Vice Presidential campaign

After Joe Biden and Harris launched their campaigns, senior members of the Congressional Black Caucus said in May 2019 that a Biden–Harris ticket would be an ideal combination to defeat Donald Trump and Mike Pence.<sup>[297]</sup> In late February, Biden won a landslide victory in the 2020 South Carolina Democratic primary with the endorsement of House Whip Jim Clyburn, with more victories on Super Tuesday. In early March, Clyburn suggested Biden choose a black woman as a



Harris formally announcing her run for the Democratic nomination for president, January 27, 2019

**KAMALA  
HARRIS FOR  
THE PEOPLE**

Logo for Harris's presidential campaign

**BIDEN  
HARRIS**

Campaign logo for the Biden–Harris ticket

running mate, commenting that "African American women needed to be rewarded for their loyalty".<sup>[298]</sup> In March, Biden committed to choosing a woman for his running mate.<sup>[299]</sup>

On April 17, 2020, Harris responded to media speculation and said that she "would be honored" to be Biden's running mate.<sup>[300]</sup> In late May, in relation to the death of George Floyd in an incident of police brutality and ensuing protests and demonstrations, Biden faced renewed calls to select a black woman to be his running mate, highlighting the law enforcement credentials of Harris and Val Demings.<sup>[301]</sup>

On June 12, *The New York Times* reported that Harris was emerging as the frontrunner to be Biden's running mate, as she is the only African American woman with the political experience typical of vice presidents.<sup>[302]</sup> On June 26, CNN reported that more than a dozen people close to the Biden search process considered Harris one of Biden's top four contenders, along with Elizabeth Warren, Val Demings, and Keisha Lance Bottoms.<sup>[303]</sup>

Biden announced that he had chosen Harris on August 11, 2020. She is the first African-American, the first Indian American, and the third female after Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin to be picked as the vice-presidential nominee for a major party ticket.<sup>[304]</sup>

## Political positions

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## Electoral history

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## Awards and honors

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In 2005, National Black Prosecutors Association awarded Harris the Thurgood Marshall Award. That year, she was featured along 19 other woman in a Newsweek report profiling "20 of America's Most Powerful Women".<sup>[305]</sup> In 2006, Harris was elected to the National District Attorneys Association's Board of Directors as vice president and appointed to co-chair its Corrections and Re-Entry Committee. She was also selected to co-chair the California District Attorneys Association's sex crimes committee.<sup>[306]</sup> Harris was also selected to serve as a Rodel Fellow with the Aspen Institute along with 24 other elected officials.<sup>[307]</sup> That same year, Howard University awarded Harris its Outstanding Alumni Award for "extraordinary work in the fields of law and public service".<sup>[308]</sup> In 2007, Ebony named her one of the "100 Most Influential Black Americans".<sup>[308]</sup> In 2008, she was named an Attorney of the Year by California Lawyer magazine.<sup>[309]</sup> A New York Times article published later that year also identified her as a woman with potential to become President of the United States, highlighting her reputation as a "tough fighter".<sup>[310]</sup>



Harris at Howard University in 2017

In 2010, California's largest legal newspaper The Daily Journal designated Harris as a top 100 lawyer and top 75 women litigators in the state.<sup>[311]</sup> In 2013, Time named Harris as one of the "100 Most Influential People in the World".<sup>[312]</sup> In 2016, the 20/20 Bipartisan Justice Center awarded Harris the Bipartisan Justice Award along with Senator Tim Scott.<sup>[313]</sup> In 2018, Harris was named the 2018 recipient of the ECOS Environmental Award for her leadership in environmental protection.<sup>[314]</sup>

## Honorary degrees

- University of Southern California, Doctor of Laws (LL.D) (May 15, 2015)<sup>[315][316][317]</sup>

- Howard University, Doctor of Humane Letters (DHL) (May 13, 2017)<sup>[318][319]</sup>

Harris gave the commencement address at the Howard ceremony.<sup>[320]</sup>

## Personal life

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Harris married attorney Douglas Emhoff, who was at one time partner-in-charge at Venable LLP's Los Angeles office,<sup>[321]</sup> on August 22, 2014, in Santa Barbara, California.<sup>[322]</sup> Harris, who is childless, became stepmother to Emhoff's two children from his previous marriage to Kerstin Emhoff.<sup>[323]</sup> As of August 2019, Harris and her husband had an estimated net worth of \$5.8 million.<sup>[324]</sup> She is a member of Third Baptist Church of San Francisco, a congregation of the American Baptist Churches USA.<sup>[325][326][327]</sup>

Harris's sister, Maya Harris, was an MSNBC political analyst; her brother-in-law, Tony West, is general counsel of Uber and a former United States Department of Justice senior official.<sup>[328]</sup> Her niece, Meena Harris, is the founder of the Phenomenal Women Action Campaign.<sup>[329]</sup>

## Publications

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Harris has written two non-fiction books and one children's book.<sup>[330][331]</sup>

- *Smart on Crime: A Career Prosecutor's Plan to Make Us Safer* (<https://archive.org/details/smart-on-crime-care-00-harr>). Chronicle Books. 2009. ISBN 978-0811865289.
- *Superheroes Are Everywhere*. Penguin Young Readers Group. 2019. ISBN 978-1984837493.
- *The Truths We Hold: An American Journey*. Diversified Publishing. 2019. ISBN 978-1984886224.

## See also

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- List of African-American United States Senators
- List of female state attorneys-general in the United States
- List of United States politicians of Indian descent
- List of United States Senators from California
- Women in the United States Senate

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## External links

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### Official

- [U.S. Senate website \(https://www.harris.senate.gov\)](https://www.harris.senate.gov)
- [Campaign website \(https://kamalaharris.org/\)](https://kamalaharris.org/)
- [Biography \(http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H001075\)](http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H001075) at the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*
- [Financial information \(federal office\) \(https://www.fec.gov/data/candidate/S6CA00584\)](https://www.fec.gov/data/candidate/S6CA00584) at the [Federal Election Commission](#)
- [Legislation sponsored \(https://www.congress.gov/member/kamala-harris/H001075\)](https://www.congress.gov/member/kamala-harris/H001075) at the [Library of Congress](#)

## Other

- [Appearances \(https://www.c-span.org/person/?kamalaharris\)](https://www.c-span.org/person/?kamalaharris) on [C-SPAN](#)
  - [Kamala Harris \(https://curlie.org/Regional/North\\_America/United\\_States/California/Government/Federal/US\\_Senate/Kamala\\_Harris\\_%5BD%5D\)](https://curlie.org/Regional/North_America/United_States/California/Government/Federal/US_Senate/Kamala_Harris_%5BD%5D) at [Curlie](#)
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