

# “Every Choice Is Loss”: Voters on Their Decision Amid Genocide in Gaza

Progressive Americans opposed to Israel’s U.S.-funded war in Gaza face a difficult choice: whether or not to vote for Harris.

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Global Research, November 04, 2024

[The Intercept](#) 1 November 2024

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

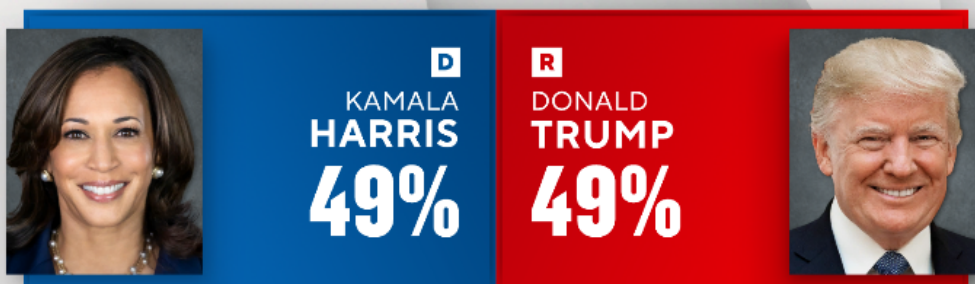
*After months of protests on the streets and organizing within the Democratic party, **Kamala Harris**’s campaign has not shown signs it will [stray](#) from the Biden administration’s steadfast [support](#) for Israel amid its genocidal war in Gaza and invasion into Lebanon. **Donald Trump** has shown no indication that he would change U.S. backing of the Israeli war machine, and is the [personal favorite](#) of Israeli **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu**. One of these two candidates will become president.*

The Intercept interviewed voters who are horrified by the ongoing U.S. support for Israel’s war, and in many cases have dedicated the past year of their lives to organizing against it in key [swing](#) states such as Georgia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Arizona.

The race remains extremely tight, with the majority of polls showing Harris and Trump at a virtual [tie](#). In the swing states that will decide the election, the candidates are either tied or hold [narrow](#) leads. Four years ago, **Joe Biden** won some key states by as few as [10,000](#) ballots. Every vote, including those voting with Gaza and Israel’s expanding [wars](#) top of mind, matters.

## CHOICE FOR PRESIDENT

LIKELY VOTERS

[Source](#)

Each voter interviewed for this article has demanded of Biden, and now Harris, an immediate, permanent ceasefire, and an [end to the U.S. policy](#) of unconditional military aid to Israel — both of which have been found to be popular among Democrats [in swing states](#) and [across the U.S.](#) The rejection of such demands have left voters uneasy about their choices.

These voters have their own reasons for deciding how, why, and whether to vote, but they fell into three distinct categories: the anguished undecided, the strategic anti-Trump Harris voters, and the protest voters either going third-party or opting out entirely.

*Responses have been condensed and edited for clarity.*

## The Anguished Undecided

***Halah Ahmad, Wisconsin, political strategist and organizer with Listen to Wisconsin***

I actually have not decided. I tried filling out my early ballot today, and to be honest with you, I started crying and I couldn't finish filling it out, because I feel so upset about the options and also I'm holding out for as long as I can.

It's a really heavy choice — every choice is loss. It is so deeply dehumanizing to have to ignore a genocide and complicity in it, and a promise to continue the same policy, which is what Vice President Harris has said. At the end of the day, we're being presented with a little bit of a false choice: If people can be protesting on this scale, and we don't have an option that can align with that, and you can suppress anti-genocide voters in that calculus, I don't know what kind of democracy you're protecting. And that's really heavy. My sister is trying to fill in her ballot, and she's like, "I feel physically nauseous." That's real. If I see a shredded child on my timeline again, I don't know what

I'm expected to do, like, vote for that?

I'm Palestinian and my husband is Lebanese, and our family is not from Gaza, but I have very close friends who've lost their family and their childhood homes and their neighborhoods. And my husband's neighborhood in Lebanon has also been virtually, completely leveled.

Folks are committed, as far as I can tell, to voting third-party, or leaving it blank, or writing something in. And then there are other folks that, on a day-to-day basis, they're reluctant Harris voters or they flip-flop between that and deciding they're not going to do it — they're going to vote third-party or something of that sort. The picture that I'm getting is that voters are pretty committed to this idea that they want to vote against genocide.

***Meghan Watts, North Carolina, graduate student***

I'm not very sure. I am probably between Harris and maybe [Jill] Stein at this point. Waiting on Harris to take a firmer stand on the genocide in Gaza and the expansion of that into Lebanon and parts of the West Bank as well. I've seen a recent [report](#) saying that our tax dollars have funded about [70 percent](#) of this current genocide, so that's an alarming number. I'm not sure what the odds are, maybe they're slim, but I'm holding out hope that she might call for an arms embargo and that it happens as immediately as possible.

Even aside from this genocide, it's been difficult to get Harris to take a firm stand on other things I'm concerned about like trans rights; having some sort of meaningful, [humane](#) immigration reform; and taking a stand on climate change. I'm a parent of trans kids in a state where right now they're able to get gender-affirming care, and in a recent interview where Harris was asked whether she supported the rights of trans individuals, her [response](#) was "I believe we should follow the law," which is concerning. In many states, they're actively antagonistic to trans people.

We absolutely do not want a second Trump presidency. However the lines have been a bit blurred between what exactly is the difference between Harris and Trump on particular issues, [such as the border](#) — probably the difference is in degrees of what they'll do, not necessarily that they'll do it.

***Maryam Hassanein, Arizona, the first Muslim American appointee to [resign](#) from the Biden administration over the war in Gaza***

As of right now, I'm still debating what I'm going to do come Tuesday. For me, it's between Harris and then third-party, probably Stein. I've voted Democrat for as long as I've been eligible to vote. The reason that I'm still debating whether to vote for Harris is really because of that history of mine, also conversations about the likelihood of a third party's chance to win. But at the same time, I've been hesitant to put my support behind Harris-Walz because of their unwillingness to denounce genocide, unwillingness to indicate that they do anything differently than what the Biden-Harris administration has done in regard to Israel-Palestine policy.

Something I've seen from the Harris-Walz campaign is that in an attempt to make up for [lost] progressive voters, for voters on the left, I'm seeing they are kind of shifting right

on certain policies, like a bit of a harsher immigration policy than is normal for a Democrat. Also not necessarily an amazing climate policy given the accelerating climate crisis. The Gaza issue is affecting other issues.

Being Muslim, I was at one point excited to join an administration that had the most Muslim employees. But then just seeing everything unfold, I recognized it really doesn't matter how many Muslim appointees you have, if you are causing so much harm to Muslims in other parts of the world. It's a face-value, surface-level type of inclusion.

I've seen debates play out in groups I'm in, and I think the main point is "Hey, we just don't want Trump in office." And while I completely understand that, I think that there is also an incredible danger to just support Harris because of that, because then it kind of sets the precedent that, "Hey, it's OK that you can do all these bad things. We're gonna still vote for you because we just don't want the other person at all."

***Reem Abuelhaj, Pennsylvania, organizer with No Ceasefire No Vote PA***

I'm a Palestinian American. I've lived in Philadelphia my whole life. I voted Democrat in every Penn election since I turned 18, but for the first time, I'm finding myself in the position of being unable to cast a ballot for the Democratic nominee for her ongoing support of Israel as it continues its genocide in Gaza.

I'm in community with a lot of people who feel similarly to me, who feel backed into a corner. We're terrified of another Trump presidency. We know that another Trump president, he would be disastrous for our communities, but we're people of conscience when it comes to the ballot. This is a time of incredible grief and fear and desperation. In my case, people I love fear for the lives of their family members in Gaza, and we feel we have to continue to put pressure in every way we can while we have this moment of leverage with swing-state voters to push the Biden-Harris administration to take action.

The thing I don't want to lose here is how many more people will be killed between November and January if the Biden-Harris administration continues this policy of unconditional support to Israel. If they don't take action before Election Day, then the next question is, how do we continue to mobilize while the Biden-Harris administration is still in office? That's a critical period of time, when we're going to see thousands of more people in Gaza and the West Bank and Lebanon be killed if the administration does not take action.

It's our assessment that with efforts like this in key swing states, it will no longer be possible for the Democratic Party to put forth a presidential candidate who is promoting a policy of unconditional support to Israel to carry out genocidal violence.

This is about this election, and this is also about the future of elections and of democracy in the U.S. We're representing a movement of voters who are concerned, not only about Vice President Harris and the Democratic Party and the Biden-Harris administration's continued support of a policy that is extremely unpopular among their electorate, but also concerned about what other issues we might see on the ballot in the future that 80 percent of Democratic voters strongly oppose, that are in violation of U.S. and international human rights law, but that the Democratic Party feel that they can continue to promote despite the mass dissent of their base.

## The Anti-Trump Voters

### ***Usama Shami, president of the Islamic Community Center of Phoenix, Arizona***

This has been very difficult. I'm going to hold my nose and vote for Harris, knowing that a third-party vote, at the end of the day is basically: If you vote for a third-party candidate, then Harris loses and Trump is gonna win. That's something that I don't want to happen.

Looking at the community as a whole, they're conflicted, and some of them are voting for a third-party candidate because they're sick of the two-party system and they're thinking about maybe doing this for the future, having a viable third-party option in the future.

Look, if I were living in California or New York, I wouldn't have a hesitation to cast a vote for a third party, or if I were in Texas for example, because you know it's not gonna make a difference. Five percent in California is not going to split the election. But we live in a swing state and every vote counts, and at least I want to have a clear conscience that, even if Trump wins, I was not part of the reason that he won.

In 2016, when Trump made the announcement that he was going to institute a [Muslim travel ban](#), our mosque was vandalized. He made the announcement during the day; in the evening, somebody came and took a huge rock and broke the office window at the mosque. We had people shooting [at the mosque]. So for me, I can see the impact of his words — a lot of people don't see that. The day after he was elected, we got people calling the mosque and leaving messages that our time is limited here in the U.S., and there is a new sheriff in town. So we don't need more of this crap.

I don't blame people for voting third-party, although in my mind they're misguided, but I don't blame them, because you have people that either know people that died, or have family that they lost in Gaza, or people that are enraged by what they're seeing daily on TV. I can see how it makes people despair that things will change, so I don't blame people for looking for a third-party candidate, looking for a different alternative.

### ***Jesse Myerson, New York, community organizer***

I live in New York, so it doesn't matter who I vote for because of this ridiculous antidemocratic Electoral College system we have. But I have been offering to coach people who live in [swing] states who are struggling with their vote, and the coaching that I would give people who live in those states is to hold their nose and vote for Harris in order to defeat Trump.

The side that I'm on in this election is against Trump, and I wish there were a better way of defeating him than electing Harris, but given that that's the only viable pathway to defeating Trump, that's the least horrific option I think we have. And I stipulate that I would never presume to counsel a Palestinian American voter to vote that way, because I fully understand why that sort of tactical calculation is not necessarily available to people who are losing dozens of family members or are at risk of doing that any day.

Knowing that the Biden administration, with no note of dissension from Harris, has been financing and materially supporting this genocide in Gaza is just a bridge too far for so

many people, and I can fully understand that. That makes perfect sense to me. If people want to write in "[Hind Rajab](#)," or vote third-party, or abstain from voting for president on grounds that it's unconscionable to vote for génocidaires, I might not share their theory of change or their power analysis, but I don't feel like I'm in any position to tell them that's a wrong way of going about things. It's good to have principles and political convictions and to have lines that beyond which you will not go.

I don't feel it's necessarily my role to tell people how to vote. I think it's my role to tell people how I am thinking about the election and hope that that's persuasive to people.

I think there are several conceivable things to say. One is that the people who are most directly carrying out that genocide and who are seeking to extend that genocide to the West Bank and to expand the borders of Israel, sometimes to parts of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, and beyond, which is to say [Israeli Finance Minister] Bezael Smotrich, [Israeli National Security Minister Itamar] Ben-Gvir, the ultra-right, which are the ruling coalition in Israel — they all want Trump to win. And so do, you know, Nazis and neo-Nazi adjacent billionaire figures like Elon Musk. They all want Trump to win, and for me, it's sufficient to want to deny them that victory.

Whoever wins, Trump or Harris, we're going to have to continue to be courageous and inventive and organized to figure out new ways of trying to end this genocide. But if it's Trump, the onslaught of attacks that his administration is going to unleash against queer and trans Americans, immigrants, Muslims, people of color, Jews, anyone whose reproductive rights are under attack, anyone who's on the front line of climate catastrophes — those are going to require that we play defense on a whole host of issues, and that is going to reduce the capacity that we have for fighting against this genocide. And honestly, given the [Project Esther plans](#), there's going to be even more direct attacks on the movement for Palestinian human rights than there are right now.

The possibilities for forward motion, slim as they would be under Harris, would be completely obliterated under Trump, and force such a defensive posture that I think we would just lose ground in huge incomprehensible ways.

"The possibilities for forward motion, slim as they would be under Harris, would be completely obliterated under Trump."

Then generally, there are a small number of elected officials in Washington, D.C., who support an [arms embargo](#), and all of them are Democrats and none of them are Republicans. And so would we want them to be junior partners in the leading coalition, or would we want them to be the opposition within the opposition, which is to say, relegated to the most marginal position in Washington, D.C.?

I only offer these thoughts from a place of profound sorrow and powerlessness and desperation. I'm terrified of the fallout of Trump and Project 2025 and Project Esther, and as somebody who is visibly Jewish at a glance in public because of my garb, I think that every neo-Nazi's favorite president coming to power personally endangers me. I am desperate to defeat him, and poll after poll in crucial swing states has shown that the best way that Harris can ensure that happens is by supporting an arms embargo— a measure supported by the vast majority of Democrats, a majority of Jews in America, a majority of voters overall. And the fact that she has refused to do that — and Biden, of course, as well — I experience as a profound betrayal, a searing, searing betrayal and

clear statement of a willingness to sacrifice my safety, the safety of all those other groups targeted for violence and repression by Trump's coalition, in the interest of continuing to support the Israeli Trump — which is Netanyahu — and his fascistic genocidal regime.

But there's simply not a good option. This coaching that I offer is, like, really scraping the bottom of the barrel of the lesser of two evils. But that's the predicament we find ourselves in.

## **The Third-Party Approach, or Opting Out Entirely**

### ***John Harris, Georgia, graduate student and organizer with No Peace, No Peach***

I will not be voting for Kamala Harris, even though I'm typically a Democratic voter. At this late hour, we have not seen policy change. We don't expect to see policy change. And so I am acting in accordance with that pledge that we outlined. I haven't yet decided if I'm going to vote for the third party or simply leave the top of the ticket blank and just vote down-ballot.

I have no illusions that I am in the majority of people in my community. I would say a lot of folks out of fear of another Trump presidency are voting for Kamala Harris. Based on everything Trump has said and his explicitly fascist rhetoric, I can't fully blame them. The reason that I and the organizers of No Peace, No Peach went the way we did was to hopefully provide some sort of alternative between the approaches — either eschewing the Democrats altogether immediately, or saying that we should just try to work under the nicer genocidal regime.

I can't blame people personally for wanting to try and mitigate harm. Trump's [rhetoric around immigrants](#) and trans rights are abhorrent. His [actions to affect abortion rights](#) have been catastrophic and lethal for many women and children across the country. But I just don't see anything from the presidency of Joe Biden or even Barack Obama that gives me any confidence that the Democrats, even in power, would do anything to mitigate harm, other than just not press the gas pedal to the floor. I will likely be responding to the outcome the same way regardless of who is elected. And that's with continued organizing.

### ***Nerdeen Kiswani, New York, organizer and founder of Within Our Lifetime***

I'm not voting for either of the major presidential candidates for both the Republican and Democratic Party, not voting for Kamala or Trump. I might abstain or do a write-in, but I think abstaining, doing a write-in, or voting third-party is all pretty much a protest vote at this point, which is something that we're seeing trending a lot in the Arab, Muslim community and among people who support Palestine.

I don't believe either choice represents what the people want, which is an end to the genocide, and I think that the Democratic Party has made it clear that they will continue to arm and fund the genocide of the Palestinian people. And so I can't in good conscience give them my vote.

I think for the Republican Party and Donald Trump, it goes without saying: He's also been racist toward the Palestinian, Arab, Muslim community, even using "Palestinian" as [a slur](#) a couple of months ago. But Kamala is also running to the right of Trump on

many things, saying that she wants to be tougher on the border than he was, saying that she wants a more “[lethal](#)” U.S. military. Constantly voting for the so-called lesser of two evils just paves the way for the greater evil.

Either way I feel like a lot of people after the election are just going to disappear when it comes to Palestine, especially if the Democratic Party wins.

We can't rely on the supporters of either party to be long-term advocates for the Palestinian struggle. So I think it's on those of us who come from oppressed communities to band together to support each other to organize face to face. Imagine if all of the millions and billions of dollars that are pumped into electoralism are actually put back into our communities. The effort and resources and canvassing that even with people who don't have money, you know, all the time and energy they give to the Democratic Party — imagine we gave that time and energy to people who are directly suffering from American imperialism and war.

***Kafia Haile, Georgia, a former university professor and Spelman graduate who voted for a Democrat every year since 1998***

I'm voting for Jill Stein. It's because my red line, the thing I care about most is Palestine. And that the U.S. should not be arming Israel when we know very clearly that Israel is committing a genocide in Palestine and with U.S. support is going after people in Lebanon and Iran and Syria. I hoped for more from Harris — I was hopeful because she's a Black woman. I recognize that as a Black woman, we have experienced so much oppression in this country that it should make us all more empathetic to what Palestinians are going through. But there's a quote from Ruha Benjamin, a college professor who attended my alma mater, Spelman College, and she said, “[Black Faces in high places are not gonna save us.](#)” It doesn't matter what their race is; we should be paying attention to their actions and policies.

Initially what I saw were Black women in my community quietly telling each other that we weren't going to vote for Harris. I think it's because we wanted to be supportive of a Black woman, but also we were concerned that if we said something negative publicly about her, then that would draw racists out who would decide that they could start saying something racist because she's already being attacked by her community. But then the voices started to get louder, and there were more. I'm in my 40s, and I'm calling for an arms embargo. And I think that within my age group — as a college-educated, middle-class, Black woman in our 40s — this is who the Democratic Party expects to vote for them without question. But I had a conversation with another friend of my age, another Black woman, and she said, “If you vote for Harris, can you look a Palestinian in the eye?” And I said, “No.”

***Dan Sheehan, Wyoming, author and editor at Literary Hub, immigrated from Ireland***

I am not voting for Kamala Harris. Personally I think the idea of voting for somebody who was a part of an administration that presided over a genocide and fully endorsed those policies and has made it clear that she's not going to break from those policies is abhorrent. I think I consider what's happened in the last 13 months to be the greatest atrocity of my lifetime. And from a moral standpoint, it feels impossible to cast a vote for her.



Having said that, I live in Wyoming. I'm conscious of the fact that I have the luxury of taking a moral stand in a state which is deep red. A large part of me thinks that if I was in a swing state, I still wouldn't be able to do it. I think I have waited and waited and waited for some small indication from the Harris camp that there would be a change in policy coming, or that they even have enough respect for the Arab American community to take their grief seriously, and I haven't seen that. But if I was in Pennsylvania, Michigan, or Wisconsin, I honestly wouldn't be able to tell you for sure, whether or not on the day I would pull the lever for Harris. It's a very dark and depressing situation that the person who has been part of an administration that has presided over a holocaust of [children](#) is the morally superior candidate of the two, and I think that's probably the case.

I think there's no doubt that Trump will make things worse for vulnerable Americans, and I don't want to see those people, most of whom object strongly to what's happening in Gaza, punished. So if I was in a swing state, it's certainly possible that I would end up voting for Harris.

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