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# Harris Tiptoes Away From Electric Vehicle Stance as Trump Seizes an Opening in Michigan

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When Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) first sought the presidency in 2019, she called for tough emissions standards for automakers that would have required all new vehicles to emit zero emissions by 2035.

In recent weeks, she has quietly walked back that stance as consumer demand for electric cars cools and pressure on the issue from [Donald Trump](#) heats up.

Harris's history of promoting electric-vehicle mandates and the Biden administration's push to bring more EVs into the nation's fleet despite sluggish sales has put Democrats on the defensive. Trump has bashed so-called "EV mandates," casting the zero-emission cars as vehicles of the elite and warned of the prospects of China overtaking the U.S. industry.

The competing pitches to members of the United Auto Workers, their retirees and communities throughout Michigan are at the forefront of Trump and Harris's fight for the state's 15 electoral votes. Polls show Harris with a slight edge in Michigan, but the race remains tight in the state and throughout the Great Lakes' battleground states of Wisconsin

and Pennsylvania.

“Not everybody should have an electric car. It might be 7 or 8% of the market. And then you also want hybrids and you want to have pure gasoline-driven powered cars. We’re going to have everything,” Trump said Friday evening at a town hall in Warren, Mich. “I will end the electric mandate on day one of the administration,” he said to cheers.

Democrats note the Biden administration hasn’t created an “electric-vehicle mandate” but has instead set goals of having half of all new U.S. vehicle sales be electric by 2030 in the name of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

“Let’s be clear—there is not a mandate on electric vehicles. People will be free to choose the vehicles that they like but we also have to make electric vehicles because we are in a global competition,” said Sen. Gary Peters (D., Mich.).

But their more defensive posture marks a shift from past elections in Michigan, where President Barack Obama repeatedly pointed to his administration’s rescue of the U.S. automakers as he sought re-election in 2012.

Harris’s campaign, in the weeks after the vice president [became the party’s nominee](#), said she doesn’t support an EV mandate. It pointed to her casting of the tiebreaking vote for the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, which provided subsidies and tax credits for EVs and created clean energy jobs in the state. Her supporters note that Trump risks alienating workers whose livelihoods depend on EVs.

“Folks in Lansing know that EVs are going to be tremendous for our economy and if he tries to kill it, he’s trying to kill our economy,” said Lansing, Mich., Mayor Andy Schor, a Democrat whose community has thousands of jobs tied to EVs.

Harris, however, did support a mandate five years ago when she first ran for president, reflecting the politics of her home state of California, which has a waiver to the Clean Air Act and has routinely pushed the federal government to enact more stringent rules. In the Senate, Harris co-sponsored legislation in May 2019 that would have created a federal standard demanding 50% of new vehicle sales be zero-emission in 2030 with the requirements ramping up to 100% by 2040.

Months later, in September 2019, Harris went further in a climate proposal released by her campaign. In the 24-page document reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, Harris's campaign wrote, "We will ensure that 50 percent of all new passenger vehicles sold are zero-emission by 2030, and 100 percent are zero-emission by 2035," according to details released at the time. The plan also called for a new "cash-for-clunkers" program that would offer incentives for consumers to trade in older vehicles for U.S.-built EVs.

Electric-car sales have started to plateau despite heavy discounts on many new vehicles that have made them more affordable. EVs accounted for 7.8% of all vehicles sold in the first eight months of 2024, compared with 7.4% a year ago, according to Motor Intelligence.

The tepid sales growth came despite a slew of subsidized interest rates, cheap lease deals and price cuts. The average price of an EV has fallen sharply over the past year and a half. Today, the cheapest version of [Tesla](#)'s popular Model 3 sedan costs just under \$39,000, down from \$47,000 at the start of 2023. Many popular models can be leased for \$400 to \$500 a month, compared with nearly \$1,000 a year and a half ago.

Car companies and dealers worry that the lackluster sales growth despite all the finance deals means that EV sales targets set by the

Biden administration and some state governments are unachievable.

On Wednesday, a group of dealers representing around 5,000 stores across the U.S. issued an open letter to both Republican and Democratic leaders in the hopes of drawing attention to poor EV sales ahead of the presidential election.

The letter warned that tax credits for EV buyers and emissions regulations weren't translating into sales. "The government may be able to force auto companies to make EVs and dealerships to sell them, but they can't force Americans to buy EVs," read the letter.

Mickey Anderson, an Omaha, Neb.,-based car dealer behind the letter, said he loses an average of \$1,000 on every EV he sells. Anderson said he hoped the letter would help convince whoever wins in November to ease up on emission regulations.

Restrictions on tailpipe emissions set in March by the U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency effectively will require that carmakers rapidly increase EV sales. By 2032, around 56% of new car sales will have to be EVs to [comply with the rules](#).

Some carmakers are already pulling back on their EV plans, delaying new models and factory openings. [Ford Motor](#) has said its EV business is [on pace to lose \\$5 billion this year](#).

Given that backdrop, some lawmakers have urged Harris's campaign to be more explicit about her opposition to EV mandates this time, a topic that the vice president has avoided in her recent appearances in the state.

Rep. Dan Kildee (D., Mich.) said Harris should "push back on this narrative that this is a mandate. Nobody is going to be forced to buy a car they don't want to buy."

Trump has also seized upon Harris's ties to [the Green New Deal](#), which was released by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I., Vt.) in 2019 and aimed to provide \$16 trillion to [fight climate change](#). The former president has likened it to a scam and vowed to produce new auto plants in the region. Democrats counter that the U.S. auto industry lost tens of thousands of jobs under Trump's watch.

In a CNN town hall event on climate change in September 2019, shortly after the release of her climate plan, Harris declared that as president she was "prepared to get rid of the filibuster to pass a Green New Deal," a reference to eliminating the Senate's supermajority requirement on legislation.

In past presidential campaigns in Michigan, the GOP has often been on the defensive over automotive policy. In the aftermath of the 2008 campaign, as the Big Three car companies faced billions in losses during the economic downturn, Mitt Romney penned an op-ed in the New York Times titled, "[Let Detroit Go Bankrupt](#)." Romney never uttered the phrase, and the piece called for a managed bankruptcy as opposed to a simple bailout of the carmakers with federal funds.

But the tagline stuck during the 2012 campaign, allowing Obama to point to his decision to pump billions into [General Motors](#) and Chrysler to keep the companies afloat while they underwent bankruptcy and overhauled their lineup. Obama defeated Romney in Michigan by about 10 percentage points.

This time, Shawn Fain, the president of the United Auto Workers union, has labeled Trump a "scab," and criticized him for holding an event at a nonunion auto supplier last year a day after President Biden became the first sitting U.S. president to join a picket line with striking UAW workers.

Democrats also note that despite Trump's frequent criticism of EVs, the

former president has sought to soften his rhetoric after [Elon Musk](#), the billionaire head of Tesla, endorsed him. “I’m for electric cars, I have to be because Elon endorsed me very strongly,” Trump said at a Georgia rally in August.

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