

KAMALA HARRIS



Image and text from “55 Things You Need to Know About Kamala Harris” published by Politico Magazine on 8/11/20 (<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/08/11/kamala-harris-vp-background-bio-biden-running-mate-2020-393885>)

Kamala Devi Harris was [born](#) in Oakland, California on October 20, 1964, the eldest of two children born to Shyamala Gopalan, a cancer researcher from India, and Donald Harris, an economist from Jamaica.

Her parents met at UC Berkeley while pursuing graduate degrees, and bonded over a shared passion for the civil rights movement, which was active on campus. After she was born, they [took](#) young Kamala along to protests in a stroller.

Her mother chose Kamala’s name as a nod both to her Indian roots—Kamala means “lotus” and is another name for the Hindu goddess Lakshmi—and the empowerment of women. “A culture that worships goddesses produces strong women,” Gopalan [told](#) the *Los Angeles Times* in 2004.

Harris’ parents [divorced](#) when she was 7, and her mother raised her and her sister, Maya, on the top floor of a yellow duplex in Berkeley.

In first grade, Harris was [bused](#) to Thousand Oaks Elementary School, which was in its second year of integration. For the next three years, she’d play “Miss Mary Mack” and cat’s cradle with her friends on the bus that traveled from her predominantly black, lower-middle-class neighborhood to her school located in a prosperous white district.

As a child, Harris went to both a Black Baptist church and a Hindu temple—embracing both her South Asian and Black identities. “My mother understood very well that she was raising two black daughters,” Harris later [wrote](#) in her autobiography, “and she was determined to make sure we would grow into confident, proud black women.”

She [visited India as a child](#) and was heavily influenced by her grandfather, a high-ranking government official who fought for Indian independence, and grandmother, an activist who traveled the countryside teaching impoverished women about birth control.



Young Kamala Harris with her mother and sister in Berkeley, California. In a program designed to desegregate schools, the girls rode a school bus to a school in a wealthier, white neighborhood.

Images provided by Harris campaign to the Associated Press; accessed from the [New York Times](#) (L) and [The Bold Italic](#).