

Cozen Currents: How Harris is Different

Navigating K-Street for the C-Suite

“A President Harris’ policies would likely be similar to those of President Biden, with some notable exceptions. But her differing governing priorities and style are what would set her apart.”

— Howard Schweitzer, CEO, Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies

The Cozen Lens

- Compared with President Biden, Vice President Harris is less of an institutionalist, would likely enter office with different priorities, and has closer relationships with Silicon Valley.
- Vice President Harris’ ascension to the top of the Democratic presidential ticket and Senator JD Vance’s (R-OH) addition to the GOP ticket have raised questions about both parties’ policy trajectories, but the outlook for 2025 tax negotiations isn’t so different than it was before the political shakeup.
- Even if Vice President Harris did not radically change President Biden’s foreign policy, as expected, her agenda stands at significant odds with the strategy former President Trump is pitching.

Who is Kamala Harris?

Less Commitment to Institutionalism. A President Harris would be likely to govern as less of an institutionalist than President Biden.

- Biden operated as a progressive institutionalist, but Harris comes from a different background. The president began his political career in a less polarized era and served for decades in a Senate that enjoyed a greater degree of bipartisanship than today’s Congress. Harris entered the Senate in the Trump era after serving as attorney general of California. As a result, she’s less likely to be attached to precedents and traditions as Biden.
- Harris racked up a progressive voting record in the Senate. The Lugar Center-McCourt School Bipartisan Index ranked her as the 95th and 94th-most bipartisan senator in the 115th and 116th Congresses, respectively. A GovTrackUS analysis classified her as “ranked most politically left.” Harris also opposed almost all of former President Trump’s nominations.
- Notably, Harris voted against confirming Trump’s nomination of Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell in 2018. If elected, she would likely choose her own nominee to lead the Fed once Powell’s term as chair expires in May 2026. A decision not to reappoint Powell wouldn’t necessarily have anything to do with the independence of the Fed but rather a desire to not inherit a Fed chair from two presidents ago.
- Harris could also be more willing to push for changes to the Senate’s filibuster rule if there is unified Democratic control of Congress. In 2019, she called for discarding the filibuster to prevent Senate Republicans from blocking climate change legislation and as vice president has advocated doing so for abortion and voting rights. Once the Senate



Howard Schweitzer

CEO, Cozen
O’Connor
Public
Strategies

hschweitzer@cozen.com
Phone: (202) 912-4855
Fax: (202) 640-5932

Related Practice Areas

- 2024 Elections
- Government Relations - Cozen O’Connor Public Strategies

starts chipping away at the filibuster for legislation, this could lead to further exceptions and its potential end.

Policy vs. Priorities. The biggest distinction between Biden and Harris would likely be their priorities.

- The platform of a Harris campaign (vice the Biden-Harris campaign) is still hazy, and if inaugurated as the 47th president, she would likely have similar policy positions as her predecessor on many issues. Her priorities, however, would likely differ.
- It's impossible for a president to devote the same amount of attention to every issue. Based on the chief executive's background or interests, he or she will inevitably focus on some topics over others. For example, a President Harris would likely make abortion access a greater priority than President Biden has. She appears more forceful and at ease than Biden, a devoted Catholic, when discussing the topic.
- One policy area where Harris' record has differed from Biden's is climate. She cosponsored the Green New Deal, which Biden has never endorsed, and called for trillions in climate spending as a presidential candidate, surpassing the Inflation Reduction Act. Biden's term has often been characterized by a difficult balancing act between two key constituencies in the Democratic coalition: environmentalists and organized labor. Harris doesn't have the same history with manufacturing and trades unions as Scranton Joe, and her more aggressive record on climate suggests that her inclination could be to come down more on the side of climate than labor. The political necessity of winning the Rust Belt could mitigate her instincts, though.

Relationships with Silicon Valley. Coming from California, Harris has closer ties to Big Tech than Biden.

- Harris would enter office with longstanding relationships in Silicon Valley, which would likely inform her approach to tech policy. In her 2010 and 2014 attorney general campaigns, Harris counted tech investors and executives among her donors, and former staff members have gone to work in Big Tech. Alphabet, Apple, and Microsoft were top contributors to her 2016 US Senate campaign and a number of tech leaders donated to her 2020 presidential campaign.
- Though Harris' term as California attorney general ended less than a decade ago, it was a different era for Big Tech, which was at the time seen more as a champion of American innovation than as a social challenge. Harris' political coming-of-age in the Bay Area and her relationships suggests that she may be more willing to hear Silicon Valley out than other Democrats, but she would be entering the White House in a very different political environment for tech.

Harris vs. Trump on Tax Reform

Harris' Progressive Bona Fides. The limited number of tax policy proposals Vice President Harris released during her Senate career indicate she hopes to use tax reform to implement broader socio-economic reforms, particularly those that benefit lower-income Americans.

- During her career in the Senate, Harris took a progressive approach to tax policy. She sponsored 19 tax bills, most frequently collaborating with notable progressive Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA). Harris co-sponsored an additional 143 tax-related bills, largely doing so in tandem with liberal policymakers.
- Harris' progressive bent is most evident in her support for refundable tax credits. She introduced the LIFT the Middle Class Act, a bill that would have established an annual refundable tax credit worth up to 100 percent of an individual's first \$3,000 in earnings or 100 percent of the first \$6,000 in earnings for married couples. Harris was also an original co-sponsor of Senator Michael Bennet's (D-CO) 2019 American Family Act which laid the foundation for the enhanced Child Tax Credit (CTC) included in the

American Rescue Plan Act.

- On the revenue raising side, Harris threw her weight behind a number of progressive proposals in 2019 to offset the cost of her proposed Medicare for All plan. In a blog post, Harris called for increasing the estate tax, indexing capital gains to income tax rates, and generally raising rates on the top one percent of earners. Harris also targeted traders, saying she “would tax Wall Street stock trades at 0.2%, bond trades at 0.1%, and derivative transactions at 0.002%.”

How Harris Could Impact 2025 Tax Negotiations. When it comes to changing the tax code, Harris shares many of President Biden’s policy goals, but her top priorities for next year’s negotiations over an extension of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) will differ from Biden’s.

- Despite Harris’ progressive bona fides, tax policy experts believe she will continue to espouse many of the tax plans put forward in the budgets of the Biden-Harris administration. The vice president was a vocal supporter of Biden’s economic policy over the last three and a half years and is expected to lean on existing Biden White House and campaign staff to support her truncated run for president.

- While Harris has yet to unveil a detailed economic agenda, her campaign told Politico last Friday that she will maintain Biden’s pledge not to raise taxes on individuals earning less than \$400,000 per year. That decision effectively locks her into a similar tax policy framework as Biden, something Democratic lawmakers on Capitol Hill suggested they would support earlier last week.

- Still, Harris’ agenda won’t be without its differences from Biden’s. In her 2019 run for president, Harris supported returning the corporate tax rate to 35 percent, well above Biden’s pledge to raise the rate to 28 percent. Such a difference would be particularly impactful if Democrats win unified control of government. Others believe that Harris’ past support for refundable tax credits indicates that she will make provisions like the enhanced CTC central to any tax negotiations.

Trump’s Plan for Taxes. For former President Trump, fully extending the expiring provisions of the TCJA would cement a signature policy achievement of his first term.

- Since late last year, Trump has campaigned on an economic message that includes further tax cuts for individuals and businesses. At a rally in May, Trump told supporters “Instead of a Biden tax hike, I’ll give you a Trump middle class, upper class, lower class, business class big tax cut.” GOP lawmakers and Trump allies off the Hill are already sketching out what that looks like, focusing on efforts to extend or make permanent many of the TCJA’s expiring provisions.

- Despite ongoing deliberations over how to extend the TCJA if Trump wins, Trump’s choice of Senator JD Vance (R-OH) as his running mate has raised concerns that Vance’s populist views could seep into Trump’s more traditional tax policy framework. Vance is known for his willingness to criticize corporations and Wall Street, having teamed up with Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) in March to introduce legislation that would eliminate tax-free all-stock mergers for companies with more than \$500 million in annual revenue.

- While Vance could play a role in policy decisions, the bigger constraint for Trump and GOP lawmakers will be the rising cost of a full extension of the TCJA, estimated at roughly twice what it was in 2017. Layering in additional cuts, like Trump’s hope to lower the corporate rate to 15 percent, will only increase those estimates.

Harris vs. Trump on Trade and Foreign Policy

Protectionism Persists. Even if Vice President Harris declared herself to not be “a protectionist Democrat” in 2019, her track record suggests that tariffs and other protectionist measures will have a good chance to persist after the election regardless of the outcome.

- Lifting tariffs is always politically complicated, making a Harris administration unlikely to pursue broad relief. However, new duties may be less likely than under President Biden in areas like clean energy, where Harris may prioritize the green transition over other competing priorities. Still, the renewed focus on environmental issues in trade could put more momentum behind initiatives targeting greenhouse gas emissions from certain industries, like the US's green steel deal with the EU that stalled last year.

- If former President Trump is re-elected, new tariffs will be all but certain, with the only questions being how soon and how high. China will likely be a target for new levies, but Trump has also floated a universal baseline tariff on all imports to the US. While there are questions about the legal standing of such a policy, that may not deter Trump from attempting it.

- One of the key trade challenges that either candidate will have to contend with is the upcoming review for the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) in 2026. Harris opposed the deal while in the Senate, arguing that it did not do enough to address labor and environmental concerns, which would likely be a major focus in any renewed negotiations. Trump, too, has sought to revise the agreement and would likely put a particular target on the country-of-origin rules that some politicians have worried are being exploited by China to import goods while avoiding US tariffs.

China, China, China. While there is a new Democratic presidential candidate, Harris is not expected to deviate significantly from the Biden administration's China policy focus on de-risking. In contrast, Trump will push for a broader decoupling of the two economies.

- Harris' continued attention to de-risking will mean prioritization of protecting advanced technology through export controls and other means. Some of the continuity will be driven by the staff cross-pollination between Harris and Biden that has occurred and likely would persist in a Harris administration, even if there are new leaders at the top. One increased area of focus for her could be human rights issues, particularly the suppression of the Uyghurs, which could mean increasing enforcement or even expansion of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

- When dealing with China in a second term, Trump has a different end goal. He is not looking to use tariffs or other punitive measures to force a trade deal but to drive a decoupling of the two economies. In practice, such a separation will be difficult to achieve. Still, this mindset could mean that the former president may not run from a trade war if he sees it as accelerating the separation between the two economies.

A Divide on Handling the Middle East. Harris has most differentiated herself from Biden with respect to her vocal acknowledgement of the impact of the Gaza conflict on the Palestinians and pronounced calls for a ceasefire.

- Harris is the most outspoken senior Biden administration official on the Gaza conflict, at times playing the "bad cop" in the administration's handling of Israel since the war began. Crucially, this stance could bolster her domestic standing among progressives and Arab-Americans, which posed a potential political vulnerability for Biden.

Trump, on the other hand, is viewed as a steadfast supporter of the state of Israel. There had been a falling out between Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since Trump left office, but Netanyahu worked hard during his visit to the US last week to re-establish his bond with Trump.
