

## Cozen Currents: Trump's Policy Agenda in Waiting



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### Related Practice Areas

- 2024 Elections
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### The Cozen Lens

- Donald Trump's legal battles are taking significant time away from his campaign, but former advisors and key allies are preparing for his potential reelection.
- Early polling of the 2024 presidential election has shown higher relative levels of support among young, Black, and Latino voters for former President Trump than in his two prior campaigns, leading analysts to speculate as to whether Trump is remaking the traditional Republican base.
- Student protests of Israel's war in Gaza have dominated the news, but polling data suggests that progressives' opposition to President Biden's support of Israel is not likely to be a major threat to his campaign.

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### Trump's Policymakers-in-Waiting

**Making Insiders from Outsiders.** Former President Trump and many of his prior advisors feel the first term was full of missed opportunities due to the administration's lack of experience with how the federal government operated, and they are hoping to avoid those mistakes in a possible second term.

- Many former Trump administration members have founded organizations that have continued to be affiliated with the America First movement since leaving government. These groups have a range of focuses, with some prioritizing policy development and others focusing more on the who and how of governing. Collectively, the goal is to ensure Trump can hit the ground running.
- Not everything coming from these groups is endorsed by Trump, and his campaign often emphasizes that they are not formally affiliated with the Trump campaign. Still, the influence of these organizations is often noticeable. Given the presence of former Trump administration officials expected to return, there is a high level of credibility to the proposals as directional indicators for a future Trump administration.

**A Fountain of Ideas.** A significant part of the planning effort for Trump's possible return is crafting policy proposals, including executive orders and regulatory actions ready to be signed on Trump's first day.

- The most prominent group driving this policy work is the [America First Policy Institute](#), which counts several former top Trump administration officials among its leadership, such as former National Economic Council Director Larry Kudlow, former acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf, and former US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer. The organization's most comprehensive work is its "[America First Agenda Pillars](#)," which discuss everything from the economy to election security.
- In addition to Trump-affiliated think tanks providing policy proposals, industry groups have also taken a more prominent role in preparing for Trump's potential reelection. Beyond the traditional policy frameworks, there are [reports](#) that some sectors are drafting executive actions that will be ready to go on Day One, a less common practice.
- Part of what makes Trump unique among other politicians is his lack of an overriding ideology. He has strong convictions about certain issues, but he is open to suggestions about many others. As such, policy proposals from Trump-associated groups and industry members will have a better-than-usual chance of being adopted.

**Staffing Up.** In addition to preparing policy proposals, these groups are working to find personnel to staff a future Trump administration.

- The Heritage Foundation’s *Project 2025* has built a network described by the Associated Press as “essentially a government-in-waiting.” Part of the group’s ambition is to reinstate Schedule F, which will significantly increase the number of government workers considered to be at-will employees and thus able to be fired by the president. The end goal of this change would be to install more individuals who share Trump’s America First vision throughout the government.
- In addition to this work, *America First Legal*, led by Stephen Miller, is aiming to recruit its network of lawyers that would support Trump’s policy agenda and could fill general counsel positions across the government. Trump previously felt the staff in these positions obstructed his goals.

## Who is Trump’s Base?

**Traditional Democrats.** National polls of the presidential race show former President Trump leading President Biden by about one point on average, the strongest position Trump has been in at this point in any of his three presidential campaigns.

- Trump’s strength in both national and state-level surveys can be at least partially attributed to his significant strength among traditionally Democratic-leaning voters. Trump and Biden are fiercely competing for the support of rank-and-file labor union members, particularly in the critical battleground state of Michigan. A poll earlier this year showed that while Biden, who is the self-declared “most pro-labor president ever,” still leads Trump in support from union households by a margin of 50 percent to 41 percent, Trump has whittled that nine percent margin down from a 16-point gap based on exit polling from the 2020 election.
- Recent polling of seven battleground states found an average of 27 percent support for Trump among Black voters. That compares with 87 percent support for President Biden among Black voters in the 2020 presidential election per exit polling. The elevated support for Trump would mark a 60-year high in Black support for a GOP presidential candidate if the polling holds true come November.
- The story is much the same when it comes to Latino voters. A recent poll found Trump leading Biden by six points among Latino voters, a reversal from the group’s 14-point preference for Biden in 2020. That change has been particularly frustrating for Democrats who believed Trump’s harsh rhetoric on immigration would hurt his support among Hispanic voters.
- Equally surprising is Trump’s surge among voters ages 18 to 29. Beginning in the fall of 2023, poll after poll has found Trump tied with or trailing Biden by single digits among voters in this age group. Trump’s high support among youth voters this cycle is a stark contrast to the 2020 election in which exit polling found voters ages 18 to 29 to have favored Biden over Trump by 24 points.

**The Road to 270.** Trump’s support among Latino, Black, and young voters is expanding his path to the 270 electoral votes needed to reclaim the presidency in 2024.

- In 2020, Biden held the hotly contested “blue wall” states of the Rust Belt while also flipping Arizona and Georgia, the first time a Democratic presidential candidate had won in either state in a number of decades. Looking ahead to November, Trump has an opportunity to reverse the map due to his significant support among voters of color.
- RealClearPolitics’ polling averages of the presidential race in the battleground states of Arizona, Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Georgia all show Trump leading by single digits. Many of the polls within the average show Trump running well above his 2020 vote share among voters of color, suggesting the new support is expanding the potential electoral map for the former president. This is particularly true of states such as Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia where much of the electorate is made up of Hispanic or Black voters. Meanwhile the Midwestern states with lower percentages of minority voters remain most competitive.

**Don’t Call It a Realignment.** While Trump’s elevated support among youth voters and voters of

color could propel him to victory in 2024, there are reasons to believe it is not indicative of a broader shift in the partisan makeup of the electorate and its subgroups.

- One reason to be skeptical that Trump's new-found support among these voting blocs marks a durable shift in the GOP's base is the high volume of "ticket splitting" evident in recent polls of both the presidential and congressional races. The latest New York Times/Siena poll of six battleground states found Trump leading Biden in five of the six states surveyed, but Democratic Senate candidates leading their Republican counterparts in each state with a competitive Senate race. As Nate Cohn points out, each of those Democratic Senate candidates is leading with traditionally high levels of support from young, Black, and Latino voters, indicating the falloff in their support for Democrats may be unique to Biden.
- The polling that suggests Democrats other than Biden still maintain high levels of support among minority voting blocs is also bolstered by recent midterm and primary results. Alan Abramowitz of Sabato's Crystal Ball noted in March that "the average level of support for Republican candidates among Black voters in 2022 was about 10%." Similarly, there was no surge in Black participation in the 2024 GOP presidential primaries in states with high numbers of Black voters such as Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia.
- Still, while Trump's high support among minority and youth voters may not indicate a permanent realignment, it does not make it any less important in the context of the 2024 presidential election. Similar to the electorate as a whole, each of those groups hold unfavorable views of Biden and may well be inclined to vote for his opponent or to stay home on Election Day.

#### How Much Does Gaza Really Matter Politically?

**A Divided Democratic Party.** Student protests against Israel and the Gaza war have been a major topic of news coverage in recent weeks and have split Democrats.

- Fifty-six years ago, a deeply divided Democratic Party held its convention in Chicago, where discord over the Vietnam War sparked protests and violence, foreshadowing Vice President Hubert Humphrey's loss to Richard Nixon in the 1968 presidential election. The party will once again meet in Chicago this year and divisions over the Gaza war have raised concerns among some Democrats that President Biden's approach to the issue could cost him votes in November.
- In a sign that the president is paying attention to the opposition from progressives within his party, Biden said earlier this month that the United States would stop supplying Israel with some weapons if Israel invades Rafah.
- At the same time, Biden has sought to strike a balance on the Gaza war. A State Department report to Congress took a measured tone, finding that "it is reasonable to assess" that US-provided weapons "have been used by Israeli security forces since October 7 in instances inconsistent" with international humanitarian law.

**A Tight Election.** All current indications are that the 2024 election is likely to be very close.

- Only six percent of voters across the seven swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin will determine the outcome. In such a polarized political environment, the universe of persuadable voters is extremely narrow.
- Ultimately, the three traditional "blue wall" states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are likely to be the ones that matter most for Biden. Recent RealClearPolitics polling averages show Biden performing better in these three Rust Belt states than in Arizona and Nevada. Amid a lack of enthusiasm for the major party candidates, the Sun Belt may be a harder reach for Biden.

**Polling on Gaza.** Data suggests that most voters do not consider the Gaza war to be their biggest issue.

- Polling indicates that the Gaza war is not the top issue for young voters. The Harvard Youth Poll found that the Israel/Palestine conflict ranked second to last. A Generation Lab poll shared with Axios found that only 13 percent of college students ranked the conflict among

their top three issues, and only eight percent of students have participated in Israel/Palestine protests on either side.

- Of the three blue wall states that matter to the outcome of the election, the Gaza war is likely to register as a potential major issue only in Michigan, home to the largest Arab American population in the country. Turnout could make the difference in a tight election, but independent voters are likely to be motivated more by issues like the economy, immigration, and abortion rights than foreign affairs.
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