

Cozen Currents: MAGA After Trump

The Cozen Lens

- Former President Trump has no clear heir apparent after his political career is over, either in 2024 or 2028, but Trumpism is here to stay as a dominant force in the Republican Party.
- Congress is facing a multi-trillion dollar tax cliff next year when the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act's individual provisions expire, but lawmakers' failure to advance a smaller tax package this year is raising concerns over their ability to navigate much larger negotiations next year.
- In the only state where President Biden is plausibly playing offense in 2024, his campaign claims North Carolina is going to be the next Georgia. The Trump campaign counters that it will be the next Florida instead.

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What Happens to Trumpism After Trump?

MAGA after Trump. Former President Trump remade the GOP in his image and will leave an imprint on the party after his political career is over.

- Like President Reagan, Trump was a generational politician who fundamentally shifted the US political system. Trump's 2016 campaign began the transition of the Republican Party from the party of country club elites and big business to a blue-collar populist party.
- Not long ago, many assumed that changing demographics and the US transition to becoming "majority-minority" would lock in electoral gains for Democrats. Instead, Trump and the MAGA movement have been able to grow the GOP. MAGA's appeal to white working-class voters is well known but polling also shows that more Black and Hispanic voters and more young voters are identifying as Republicans since 2020.
- This year is Trump's third and presumably final presidential campaign. After he leaves the political scene, the GOP won't revert back to the pre-2016 version of the party. Trump expanded the tent by shifting the GOP's policy positions and political messaging. Trumpism is here to stay.

Who's the Heir to Trump? Trump dominates the GOP but has no obvious successor.

- Since winning the GOP presidential nomination in 2016, Trump has gradually expanded his hold over the party, culminating in a third successive nomination and the installation of his handpicked leadership at the Republican National Committee this year. Trump has no clear heir apparent, however. Former Vice President Mike Pence broke with him after January 6th and is persona non grata in many MAGA circles.
- It will be difficult for any Republican to claim to be Trump's heir. The 45th president has a unique relationship with his base. No one else has the same degree of loyalty from supporters or the cult of personality that Trump has cultivated with the MAGA base. Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL), for example, positioned his 2024 presidential campaign as "Trumpism without Trump" but failed to win over the MAGA faithful.
- Regardless of whether Trump wins or loses, the aftermath of the 2024 presidential election will likely see a leadership battle over the future of the MAGA movement. Trump's vice-presidential selection will be best positioned to claim his legacy. His VP pick will be a natural successor having campaigned with Trump and after potentially serving four years in the White House with him. There will be others hoping to pick up Trump's mantle, however. Senators J.D. Vance (R-OH) and Rick Scott (R-FL) or Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) could claim to be heirs to Trump, for example.



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Policy Reset. Regardless of who takes the reins of Trumpism after Trump, the policy changes he oversaw will continue.

- On economic policy, Trump rejected traditional Republican policies. He turned the GOP away from free trade to embrace protectionist policies like tariffs in the name of shielding US industry. It's hard to see Republicans going back after the gains that MAGA has made with working-class voters.
- Trumpism also dialed up the culture wars to the max. Trump's political style is anti-elite, and his "own the libs" mentality has become commonplace among Republicans. Getting tough on immigration is one of Trump's signature issues and it's a topic that has continued to resonate politically. Any successor to Trump is likely to focus on waging battles over social issues to maximize appeal to the base.

A Harbinger of Next Year's Tax War

Stalled Out. A \$78 billion bipartisan tax deal negotiated by two of Congress' top tax writers has hit a wall of resistance in the Senate despite widespread support from House lawmakers and the White House.

- Senate Finance Committee Chair Ron Wyden (D-OR) and House Ways and Means Committee Chair Jason Smith (R-MO) surprised many when they announced a \$78 billion bipartisan tax deal earlier this year. Evenly split between a trio of popular business tax breaks and an enhancement of the Child Tax Credit (CTC), the bill appeared primed to quickly reach President Biden's desk.
- Despite a 357-to-70 vote advancing the Wyden-Smith deal out of the House, the legislation has completely stalled out in the Senate. Top Senate GOP tax writer Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), the Senate Finance Committee ranking member, is opposed to the legislation, and he has the backing of both current Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) as well as future Senate GOP leader hopefuls, Senators John Thune (R-SD) and John Cornyn (R-TX).
- While Crapo has publicly cited concerns with the expansion of the CTC to explain his opposition, he has privately indicated he would prefer to save any tax negotiations for next year. Crapo and other GOP members believe Republicans will regain the Senate majority in November, making Crapo Senate Finance Committee chair and giving the party greater leverage to advance its tax priorities.

Warning Signs. The failure to quickly advance the Wyden-Smith deal this year has created dividing lines both between top tax negotiators and within the parties themselves that may spill into next year's negotiations.

- Although Wyden and Smith were able to find agreement across partisan lines this year, they chose to advance their bill without sign-off from Crapo or House Ways and Means Committee Ranking Member Richard Neal (D-MA). That decision has incensed Crapo, who has repeatedly pushed back against claims from Smith and Wyden that he was closely involved in this year's talks. In February, Crapo stated, "Efforts to pressure Senate Republicans to rubber stamp the Wyden/Smith tax deal have been counterproductive."
- A breakdown in relations between the top tax writers creates significant uncertainty around their ability to extend or modify the trillions in expiring Tax Cuts and Jobs Act provisions next December. Wyden recently told Punchbowl News, "Nobody knows what the schedule is going to be like for sure in 2025. Is it going to bleed into 2026? You certainly can't rule that out." Crapo similarly told the outlet whether Congress can complete a tax bill at all next year or not is a "very legitimate concern."
- Dividing lines are already cropping up between the two parties now that the Wyden-Smith bill has been stopped in its tracks. Some Democrats, believing they too could have greater leverage in talks next year, plan to push for a larger expansion of the CTC and other anti-poverty credits. They also hold reservations about many of the business tax breaks traditionally supported by the GOP, particularly now that the trio included in the Wyden-Smith bill remain unaddressed.

The Election Will Have the Final Say. Whether the parties will only need to address internal

divisions in next year's tax fight, or cross-party divisions as well, will be determined by the November elections.

- If either party can win the White House along with both chambers of Congress, they will gain access to budget *reconciliation*, a congressional process by which they can pass tax legislation with only simple majority support in the Senate. Such an outcome would allow either party's top tax writers to avoid difficult negotiations with the other side and instead pursue a more aggressive tax package.
- Still, unified control of government will not guarantee an extreme outcome. This year's negotiations have unearthed internal GOP *divisions* over whether or not to advance the Wyden-Smith bill at all as well as over fully paying for tax cuts or not. Meanwhile many moderate Democrats remain wary of Biden's calls for a higher corporate tax rate and a new wealth tax.

Is Carolina Blue a Real Thing?

The Large Print of the Tar Heel. This presidential election may be the one that finally lifts North Carolina to the status of a true swing state.

- Recent results in North Carolina have been agonizingly close: an average margin of less than two points in presidential elections since 2008. Democratic President Obama won it narrowly in 2008. In 2020, it was the state President Trump won by the least.
- Democrats are trying to make North Carolina competitive ahead of November, which would make it the only state in the country where Biden is credibly playing offense; in all other places he's just trying to hold on to what he won last time around.
- North Carolina is the ninth most populous state in the country, large enough to grant it sixteen votes in the electoral college after the recent reapportionment. At the moment, it's just outside of the six undeniable swing states, looking in. If it was added to the roster, it would jump to the second-most important behind Pennsylvania, tied with Georgia, and ahead of Michigan, Arizona, Wisconsin, and Nevada.

A Long Unrealized Dream. Democrats are looking at North Carolina this cycle with the hope it will turn out to look like Georgia.

- The Tar Heel state has long been just out of Democrats' reach. The state is *outpacing* the national average in population growth, and much of that is within a region known as the Research Triangle, an area populated by universities and high-tech industries. Growth in classic suburban neighborhoods filled with white-collar professionals has the party cautiously optimistic this election could be the one.
- Democrats are also hoping on the so-called reverse coattails effect, in which candidates lower down the ballot give their party's presidential nominee a boost. The state is set to have the highest-profile, most expensive gubernatorial contest of 2024, pitting Attorney General Josh Stein (D) against Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson (R). While Stein won both his terms simultaneously with Trump and is seen as a strong candidate, Robinson has made a litany of remarks controversial even by today's *standards*. Polling shows Stein outperforming Biden here by a substantial amount, and the president's campaign hopes some of that magic can trickle up and boost turnout.
- This will also be the first election since the Republican state legislature enacted a 12-week abortion ban, something Democrats will raise to the fore. Robinson has advocated going even further by enacting a six-week ban. Democrats' greatest weakness in the state has been low *turnout*: a higher percentage of registered Republicans consistently vote in the *state*. Between Robinson, abortion, and trying to contest as many *local* elections as possible, the idea is that this will be precisely the shot in the arm needed to get Democrats to the polls.

History as a Guide. Republicans are looking at North Carolina this cycle with the hope it will turn out to look like Florida.

- For all of those close calls, Democrats have only won the state in two presidential elections since 1965: Southern sweetheart President Carter in 1976 and the Obama blowout of 2008. Republicans also swept the US Senate and state Supreme Court statewide races during the

2022 midterms. If the state elects a GOP governor this year, Republicans will gain full political control over the state. With a conservative majority on the state Supreme Court, Democrats could soon have no viable path to win a majority in either house of the legislature under heavily gerrymandered districts.

- North Carolina's changing demographics may be hurting as much as helping Democrats. Recent poor polling has Biden doing significantly worse with young voters and people of color, who are crucial and consistent through-lines in the pitch for how they would win the state. While blue and suburban counties have been growing at a considerable clip, growth in red counties is even *faster*. In a nation increasingly polarized by geographical divides, North Carolina ranks behind only Texas in the total number of rural voters.

- At the moment, Trump outpolls Biden in the state by around four points — not a gigantic lead, and with much time still left to go — but an advantage nevertheless. Furthermore, registered voters in North Carolina are even more *pessimistic* about the state of the economy than the nation as a whole, cutting off one of Biden's key pitches for re-election.
