

Policy Backgrounder: US Election, Transition, and Early Actions of the New Administration

November 8, 2024

Key Insights

This Backgrounder discusses the election results and several domestic policy issues, some of which will likely be addressed early in the new Administration.

- Relatively small shifts in the voting preferences, including among members of minority groups and younger voters, drove the results in the Presidential election and in some elections for the House and Senate.
- The economy was a key issue, with only 5% of respondents in one exit poll believing the condition of the nation's economy is "excellent," 27% "good," 35% "not so good," and 32% "poor"; 43% were "dissatisfied" about the state of the country, and 29% "angry"—figures that indicate the anti-incumbent trend running through the election.
- The next step is the transition, about which significant questions remain, although during the campaign, the President-Elect promised significant actions as soon as he enters office. Likely areas for action include regulatory reform and possibly immigration and tariffs.

The Electorate and the Results

Preliminary exit polls from news organizations—which will be further refined and analyzed by academics—contain significant data explaining the results and why they differed from some earlier polling. These exit polls showed several principal factors driving the result in a Presidential race decided more quickly than many observers expected. Even though the state of democracy was the largest single issue identified in NBC's exit poll (35% overall and the principal concern of [over 60%](#) of Harris voters), and three-quarters of all voters in that poll agreed that democracy is under threat, a continuing concern on the economy ([over 40%](#) of Trump voters' principal issue) overcame those broader fears. Abortion (14%) and immigration (11%) rounded out the top four issues driving voting intentions. More broadly, in that [poll](#), 43% were "dissatisfied" about the state of the country, and 29% "angry"—figures that indicate the anti-incumbent trend running through the election.

Nearly half of those polled [said](#) they are worse off financially than four years ago, showing the impact of inflation. According to [another](#) exit poll, 5% of respondents believe the condition of the nation's economy is "excellent," 27% "good," 35% "not so good," and 32% "poor"; Harris was unable to convince voters that recent improvements in the economy, including the decline in headline inflation and stronger than expected growth, have made a difference in their lives.

Overall, according to the University of Florida's Election Lab, there were nearly [86 million](#) early and mail votes -- 46.7 million early votes and nearly 39.4 million votes by mail. The trend of early voting and voting by mail is here to stay, and campaigns will need to change their tactics accordingly.

The electorate as a whole [appears](#) to have been slightly more female than in 2020 (54% women, up 1%; 45% men, down 2%). Harris won [54%](#) of female voters. In a sharply divided country, it is unsurprising that [small shifts](#) among important voting blocs could shift the overall outcome. A shift in the male Black vote to 16% for Trump in Georgia impacted the result there (Blacks were 27% of the electorate in Georgia). Nationally, [12%](#) of Black voters and 45% of Latino voters chose Trump—significant shifts from 2020. Trump also surpassed 40% among all [age](#) groups, including the youngest voters—another factor contributing to the overall result. [Educational divide](#) between those with bachelor’s degrees and those without was also pronounced in the results. While Harris had counted on what was supposed to be a [stronger ground game](#) of a larger field operation and getting voters in key constituencies to the polls—including for early voting—it was not enough to overcome both shifts in the electorate and concerns over the economy.

The election also showed that some Trump voters were willing to split tickets, notably in North Carolina with an 11% gap between the [results](#) for Trump and the Republican candidate for Governor, although this phenomenon did not help Sherrod Brown win reelection in Ohio. Democrats, defending more seats, always had a difficult path in the Senate, but overall, with several races still to call, Republicans had a slightly better result in the Senate (52 seats thus far, flipping 3 Democratic seats) than polling expected. Too many House races remain undecided to know who will have control of the House, but as of Friday morning, the partisan balance is [210-198](#), with a net gain of 4 for Republicans—far different than earlier polling showing an expected small Democratic majority but consistent with an anti-incumbent trend.

The Transition

The next step is to begin the transition, well in advance of Inauguration Day on January 20. Thus far, the Trump campaign has not announced whether it will participate in the official transition run by the [General Services Administration](#). Its efforts have rather been [run](#) by the campaign itself and closely aligned groups such as the America First Policy Institute, which has an [America First Transition Project](#). The issue is important for several reasons: first, working through the official transition, transition teams are normally given access to agencies ahead of the Inauguration so that the incoming Administration has a sense of key issues and can move quickly once the transition occurs. Two key Trump aides, Howard Lutnick and Linda McMahon, have [reportedly](#) taken the [lead](#) in organizing and implementing the transition.

While the President has [pledged](#) a “smooth” transition, there remain questions as to whether non-government entities can have the same access to government facilities as the official Presidential Transition can. Second, one important role of any transition is to begin reviewing and vetting the thousands of applicants for government positions, ranging from the Cabinet to “Schedule C” politically-appointed positions in Federal agencies.

Early Actions

The issue is particularly important this year because the President-Elect has promised a number of actions to be taken by the new Administration as soon as in office. (The Washington Post [noted](#) promises for early action, ranging from beginning “the largest deportation action in American history” to rescinding policies on electric vehicles to repealing other Biden Administration regulations.) While some of these actions may not actually occur on the first day, any new President will want to show action on the first day in office (President Biden’s first day actions [included](#) steps on the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory reform, climate change, and racial equity.)

To that end, several important domestic policy areas may arise either on the first day or early in the new Administration. This is, of course, a non-exclusive list focused on several areas on which CED has written; we will continue to update other policy areas as more information becomes available.

Tariffs: One source involved in policy planning told *Politico* that “[t]here’s one policy area that’s going to be defining for the second Trump administration and that’s tariffs. And there’s a very small group of people working on that and it’s the most important part of the policy planning for the second administration.” CED’s Policy Backgrounder [The US Presidential Candidates’ Positions on Trade](#) discusses the President’s relatively wide role in tariff policy, which undergirds the idea that the new Administration could take early action on tariffs.

Climate: It is entirely possible that the new Administration will withdraw from the Paris Agreement on climate change either on the first day or early in the new Administration (his first Administration [withdrew](#) from it on June 1, 2017).

Regulatory reform: Some Presidents, including President Biden, have [paused](#) or frozen regulations in process or not fully in force at the beginning of their terms. In his first term, President Trump [issued](#) an Executive Order on regulatory reform on February 24, 2017. It is entirely possible that he could also issue an analogous Presidential Memorandum to agency heads to that issued by President Biden pausing or freezing enforcement of certain regulations issued late in the Biden Administration and/or repealing other proposed regulations such as the SEC’s proposed [climate disclosure regulation](#), now paused pending judicial review. More broadly, it would take time to repeal other regulations such as those on [overtime](#) and the [classification](#) of independent contractors and employees.

Industrial policy/electric vehicles: As noted above, in the campaign, the President-Elect said he would “repeal Biden’s electric vehicle mandate” on his first day in office. Most basically, this could be seen as a reference to the Administration’s [regulations](#) on [fuel standards](#) for vehicle model years 2027-2031 from the Department of Transportation and EPA’s regulations on [pollution standards](#) for cars and light trucks, each of which is designed to encourage transition to electric vehicles. More broadly, towards the end of the campaign, Trump was highly [critical](#) of the CHIPS and Science Act, saying “that chip deal is so bad. We put up billions of dollars for rich companies to come in and borrow the money and build chip companies here, and they’re not going to give us the good companies anyway” and suggesting tariffs instead to encourage building chip factories here. House Speaker Mike Johnson also [suggested](#) a GOP congressional majority “probably will” try to repeal the CHIPS Act but then said that he only wanted to “streamline” it. Realistically, a new Administration would find it difficult to claw back subsidies already given under the Act, and some tech experts [expect](#) it would continue under the new Administration.

Tax bill: While Congress will begin a lame-duck session in the next few weeks, because of the rule that a bill cannot be continued from one Congress to another, realistically, there will be little if any progress on a tax bill to replace the expiring provisions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act this year. It is entirely possible, perhaps even probable, that the new President would give outlines of tax policy and expectations for a bill in an early address to Congress.

Conclusion

It is very early days in understanding what policies the new Administration will adopt and how quickly. It seems clear, however, that it wants to learn from—and change—its slow start in 2017 and is prepared to take actions, including significant actions, early in the Administration, in some cases even before Cabinet officers may be confirmed by the Senate. Regulatory reform, tariffs, and other areas where the Administration’s powers are clearer (or can be asserted) are likely candidates for early action.

About the Authors

[David Young](#) is the President of the Committee for Economic Development, the public policy center of The Conference Board.

[John Gardner](#) is Vice President, Public Policy, at the Committee for Economic Development, the public policy center of The Conference Board.

About The Conference Board

The Conference Board is the member-driven think tank that delivers Trusted Insights for What's Ahead™. Founded in 1916, we are a non-partisan, not-for-profit entity holding 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status in the United States. www.ConferenceBoard.org

The Committee for Economic Development (CED) is the public policy center of The Conference Board. The nonprofit, nonpartisan, business-led policy center delivers trusted insights and reasoned solutions in the nation's interest. CED Trustees are chief executive officers and key executives of leading US companies who bring their unique experience to address today's pressing policy issues. Collectively, they represent 30+ industries and over 4 million employees. www.ConferenceBoard.org/us/Committee-Economic-Development

© 2024 The Conference Board, Inc. All rights reserved.