

The US Elections: A Comparative Perspective on the Likely Policies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden

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The 2020 United States Presidential Elections, set for November 3rd, is perhaps deserving of the term ‘consequential’ more so than many other elections that have come before it. For the four years since Donald Trump first came into office and re-aligned US policy towards a more populist and inward-looking track at home and abroad, it represents a test for the viability of the Trumpian style of politics. For a nation that has been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and whose governmental response has so far been not enough to stymie the tide of infection and death, it represents a potential turning point in pandemic management. And for allies and rivals alike, it will be a signal for either a systemic shift or a continuation of the US’ current relationships. The culmination of years’ worth of domestic and international factors, set to the backdrop of one of the deadliest pandemics the world has ever seen, will undoubtedly mark the outcome of the 2020 elections as one with far-reaching consequences for both the US and the world in general.

As a fellow NATO member and ally who has experienced a long period of deteriorating bilateral relations with the US, Turkey will also be among the list of countries that will experience both short and long-term changes in its relationship with the US, depending on the outcome of the election. It is therefore both prudent and necessary to articulate the many ways the upcoming elections will shape US policy at home and abroad, to gain a deeper understanding of what awaits the US moving forward, but also to contextualize under which President the Turkey-US relationship might find some much-needed improvement. Although touching on the subject, the main thrust of this analysis paper isn’t to speculate on which candidate will win the election; elections are notoriously difficult to call for even the most capable observers, and as the previous election in 2016 shows there is always the possibility of a last-minute upset. Instead, this analysis will focus on contrasting the policy priorities of Donald J. Trump and Joe R. Biden, and assess how the next 4 years are likely to be shaped in terms of domestic and international developments under each candidate.

The Current State of Both Campaigns

Before delving too deeply into how a Joe Biden or Donald Trump presidency will look like in the 2021-2025 term, we need to consider how both campaigns are faring going into the election. With only days to go before the election, both the Biden-Harris and Trump-Pence campaigns have ramped up their efforts in trying to secure votes in swing states crucial to a path to victory.

As the incumbent President, Donald Trump and his running mate Vice President Mike Pence have struggled with blowback for the government’s weak performance in handling the COVID-19 crisis. Over 56% of US voters do not approve of President Trump’s handling of COVID-19¹ and this

¹ <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/coronavirus-polls/>

significant margin has had an effect on other down-the-ballot Senate Republican candidates running for re-election. In a number of reliably red states like Kansas and Montana, where Trump won in 2016 with double-digit margins, the Republican lead has dropped to single figures² and several other states that were only narrowly lost by the Trump campaign now have a very clear Democratic lead which makes it very unlikely for Trump to make significant progress in those states before election day. Although President Trump has made post-pandemic job recovery a key priority of his 2020 re-election campaign platform,³ the continuing recession caused by COVID-19 has eroded his previously strong numbers among independent and suburban voters on his handling of the economy.⁴ However, support for Donald Trump among Republicans have overall stayed relatively consistent throughout the pandemic,⁵ as the Republican base seem to be more concerned with issues like the economy, immigration and abortion compared to the coronavirus. Another point of consideration should be that unlike 2016, voters are now very familiar with what a Trump government looks like.

The campaign itself has gone through a number of rough patches in recent months, as campaign manager Brad Parscale, who was influential in securing Trump a victory in 2016 during his time as the campaign's digital media director, was replaced by Trump just four months before the election.⁶ The campaign's decision to still have in-person campaign events despite the pandemic, as well as the decision to shift campaign spending away from local TV ads in favor of buying more air time on the conservative news outlet Fox News⁷ over the summer has been viewed as questionable. The recent COVID-19 diagnosis of President Trump, alongside a number of his administration officials, has raised concerns over the intensity with which the President can effectively campaign in the final days of the election cycle. In addition, the first Presidential debate between Trump and Biden was almost universally viewed as chaotic and unrepresentative, with opinion on who ultimately won the debate being largely a matter of political preference.⁸ Donald Trump failing to denounce the white supremacist group "Proud Boys" during the debate was seen by both conservative and liberal news outlets alike as a big 'missed opportunity'. Overall, despite continued support from their base, President Trump will need to overcome negative public opinion on his handling of COVID-19, as well as the fallout of an 'infected' White House in order to secure a second term.



On the Democratic side, the Joe Biden – Kamala Harris campaign has had a relatively smoother campaigning period. After accepting his Democratic candidacy, Joe Biden has sworn off holding in-person campaign rally events due to the risk of COVID-19.⁹ With all former Democratic

² <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/07/17/trumps-campaign-is-in-freefall-with-covid-19-on-voters-minds/>

³ https://ballotpedia.org/Donald_Trump_presidential_campaign,_2020

⁴ <https://politics.georgetown.edu/2020/08/10/three-months-out-from-the-election-president-trump-faces-eroding-support-on-the-economy-major-challenges-with-independent-suburban-and-middle-class-voters/>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/24/us/politics/trump-economy.html>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53426285>

⁷ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/09/trump-summer-ad-spending-409075>

⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/01/politics/donald-trump-debate-polls-joe-biden/index.html>

⁹ <https://www.france24.com/en/20200701-biden-says-will-not-hold-campaign-rallies-due-to-pandemic>

presidential candidates including the runner-up Bernie Sanders endorsing Biden, the campaign has also racked up a number of endorsements from Republican and independent groups.¹⁰ Managed by Jennifer O'Malley Dillon, the former campaign manager for Beto O'Rourke's 2020 presidential campaign, the Biden-Harris campaign's pre-election polling performance in a number of swing states like Michigan, North Carolina and Arizona have resulted in a comfortable projected lead for Joe Biden. Currently, an aggregate of polling data show Joe Biden winning the election with an average %11 lead,¹¹ which is likely to grow if the current trend holds. It remains to be seen whether this lead will be representative of the actual election results, with concerns surrounding mail-in ballots and several states' State Board of Elections changing voting rules close to the election date.¹² Joe Biden's decision to pick Senator and former candidate Kamala Harris as his running mate, while celebrated by African-American and other minority voters as a milestone for US politics, was met with relative disappointment from the Democratic Party's more progressive left wing, due to concerns over her record on police reform. However, the favorability boost from the black Democratic voting bloc with regards to Harris,¹³ coupled with the general sentiment towards uniting to refuse Donald Trump a second term is unlikely to cause significant division within Democratic ranks.

The Future of US Policy Under Trump and Biden

Domestic Policy

COVID-19

Donald Trump

It is no secret that President Trump's administration has been sluggish in formulating a coherent and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After the initial outbreak of cases were recorded in January 21 of this year, President Trump's initial statements regarding the situation being 'under control', and that like a miracle, the virus 'will disappear'¹⁴ before summer were heavily criticized by voters and health experts alike. As infection figures have continued to grow and the White House came under increased pressure, the administration first declared a country-wide national emergency¹⁵ on March 13, while also setting a three-pronged guideline on when and how individual states should re-open.¹⁶ However, the non-enforceable nature of these guidelines, primarily meant as a framework for states to consult with the federal government rather than obey standardized procedures, have led to different levels of strictness on state

¹⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-biden-republicans-exclus-idUSKBN25U1AK>

¹¹ <https://www.270towin.com/2020-polls-biden-trump/>

¹² <https://abcnews.go.com/US/thousands-north-carolina-ballots-limbo-amid-challenges-rule/story?id=73432943>

¹³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/08/15/kamala-harris-joe-biden-black-voters-2020-election/3308312001/>

¹⁴ <https://www.npr.org/sections/latest-updates-trump-covid-19-results/2020/10/02/919432383/how-trump-has-downplayed-the-coronavirus-pandemic>

¹⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/proclamation-declaring-national-emergency-concerning-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak/>

¹⁶ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica/>

measures. Furthermore, several instances of Donald Trump conflicting with and even outright contradicting the head of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, Dr. Anthony Fauci, has caused confusion on the reliability of information coming out of the White House.

Currently, Donald Trump's plan on combatting the COVID-19 pandemic mainly focuses on post-pandemic economic recovery and the continued implementation of the official White House re-opening guidelines. To that effect, the Trump administration has passed a number of coronavirus relief packages under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) starting on March.¹⁷ Meant to aid the growing number of struggling Americans through \$600 per-week COVID unemployment benefits and \$1,200 relief checks for every US taxpayer with social security, the CARES Act also includes a variety of resource-allocation provisions for the health and airline industries, Medicare payments and small business loans totaling in \$2.2 trillion, making it the single biggest stimulus bill in US history.¹⁸ The stimulus package has proved to be a highly contentious issue for both sides, with a number of Republicans voting against it on the grounds that it incentivizes unemployment and Democrats criticizing it for not making more substantial changes. As the Act's initial stimulus payment ended in July, negotiations for a further \$1.5 trillion in resources are currently underway, with pressure on President Trump from within the Republican Party to reduce the budget to \$1 trillion and from the Democrats to raise it to \$2.2 trillion.¹⁹ However, Trump's recent shutting down of the latest round of coronavirus stimulus package talks with the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives until after the election²⁰ will likely further complicate the process.

If elected for a second term and provided that the Republicans maintain their control of the Senate, President Trump will likely order a second stimulus package to be rushed through as soon as possible either under its current \$1.5 trillion budget, or perhaps a slightly reduced one. While the CARES Act provides necessary and meaningful financial assistance to struggling businesses and over 12.5 million²¹ unemployed Americans, the worry that a new stimulus package will not be enough to return the US economy to its pre-pandemic levels without significant restructuring will continue.²² Meanwhile, it is widely expected that the current White House coronavirus guidelines will remain largely unchanged barring major shifts in the trajectory of the pandemic.

Joe Biden

As the challenger, Joe Biden has had the benefit of seeing what has worked with the Trump administration's current plan and what has failed to resonate with people. The Biden campaign's proposed 7-point plan on tackling COVID-19 calls for such things as: restoring credibility on pandemic-related information through restoring the White House National Security Council Directorate for Global Health Security and Biodefense which was eliminated by the Trump administration in 2018, making coronavirus testing free and widely available for everyone regardless of social security, age and citizenship status, additional funding for first responders,

¹⁷ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr748/text>

¹⁸ <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-03-25/vote-senate-on-2-trillion-economic-stimulus-package-coronavirus>

¹⁹ <https://abc7chicago.com/stimulus-package-checks-second-covid-relief/6428652/>

²⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/06/politics/stimulus-pelosi-trump-coronavirus/index.htm>

²¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/193280/seasonally-adjusted-monthly-number-of-unemployed-persons-in-the-usa/>

²² <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-07-30/The-2nd-stimulus-package-is-just-a-bandit-to-U-S-s-pandemic-economy-SxrzcQ1aog/index.html>

teachers and medical professionals, the creation of a new paid leave scheme with a new federal fund covering the salaries of anyone earning up to \$1,400 a week, as well as various increases to federal-run programs such as Medicaid and food relief.²³ Additionally, Biden has promised to



overhaul the pandemic re-opening guidelines process by instituting stronger ‘contact tracing’ measures (the process of identifying all people that a COVID-19 patient has come into contact with in a 2-week period) as well as a federal mandate on wearing face masks and social distancing protocols.²⁴ A particular focus of Joe Biden’s pandemic recovery plan is likely to be on the education system, as the Biden-Harris

campaign has called for forgiving up to \$10,000 in federal student loans,²⁵ and instituting remote student learning assistance.

Overall, the Biden plan for coronavirus relief seeks to mainly expand on the already-existing CARES Act provisions through additional funding, with an increased emphasis on protecting vulnerable demographics and more social relief programs. Whether Joe Biden’s plan can be implemented in full if he’s elected President is still too early to tell, but there are indications that a more robust stimulus package will be on the table depending on the outcome of the elections. Should Biden emerge victorious with noticeable gains from other down-ballot Democratic candidates for Congress, it is likely that funding for the current stimulus package will increase to match the Democrats’ proposed \$2.2 trillion. House of Representatives leader Nancy Pelosi has taken a hardline approach against lowering the bill’s budget in the hopes that Joe Biden will win the Presidency and that the Republicans in Congress will lose their majority.²⁶ Additionally, a recent Gallup poll has found that the Democrats’ current stimulus package proposal has significant bipartisan support from moderate Republicans,²⁷ which will make it easier for the Biden administration to sign it into law if elected.

It is, however, extremely clear that neither candidate’s plans are expecting a short-term recovery, and are primarily more concerned with managing the long-term effects of COVID-19.

The Economy

Donald Trump

Back in 2016, Donald Trump the candidate ran on a platform of job creation and empowering the American economy to ‘Make America Great Again’, a powerful message that helped carry him to the White House. As a first-term president, he has often bragged about his performance in presiding over the rising stock market and a smaller-than-expected yet consistent growth in

²³ <https://joebiden.com/covid-plan/>

²⁴ <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/21455918/biden-covid-coronavirus-pandemic-response-president-trump>

²⁵ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/with-trump-postponing-a-stimulus-package-heres-what-joe-bidens-coronavirus-relief-plan-would-prioritize-11602089318>

²⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/06/nancy-pelosi-coronavirus-relief-bill-391963>

²⁷ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/318452/broad-bipartisan-support-additional-stimulus.aspx>

GDP.²⁸ Although there are studies that have claimed the 6.6 million jobs President Trump created is comparatively small in relation to past presidents and that the US manufacturing industry has actually lost nearly 750,000 jobs in his first three years in office,²⁹ it is undeniable that the US was experiencing a growing economy before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. So much so that the Trump administration's pre-COVID performance has been one of his central arguments for re-election. However, President Trump's most prominent domestic economic accomplishment to date has been the passing of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) of 2017, which cut the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, and instituted a number of temporary tax deductions and exemptions for the high-income tax bracket until 2025.³⁰ On the other hand, the Trump administration's ongoing trade war with China from 2018 onward has been a controversial mark on Trump's economic prowess. President Trump's tariff changes and threats, with the aim of reducing the US' trade deficit with China, has hurt the economies of both countries. A breadth of studies on the subject has projected that the cost of the Trump administration's trade war has predominantly fallen on US companies and particularly on the agricultural industry.³¹ However, all of these issues pale in comparison to the economic devastation caused by COVID-19, and it is with a relatively mixed record that Donald Trump will be seeking a second term.

A potential second term will see an emboldened Trump administration, convinced of the righteousness of their agenda with regards to both job creation and continuing the trade war with China. As part of their 'America First' policy, the Trump-Pence campaign's current economic plan for the second term include such points as: creating 10 million new jobs in the next 10 months, "Made in America" tax credits, ending reliance on China through tax incentives for US manufacturing and punishments for companies that outsource to China, etc.³² In addition, President Trump will likely push forward with slashing prescription drug costs,³³ a key promise he has repeatedly made that has made him popular with older voters. Although minor pushback from the pharmaceutical industry is expected, the bipartisan popularity of the issue will continue to earn Trump some sympathy in his second term. Curiously, the campaign's economic plan makes no mention of specific policies like the tax reductions that came with the TCJA. It is heavily speculated that the Trump administration will 'double down' on existing tax cuts in its second term, and renew the individual tax deductions for 2025 and onwards.³⁴ As covered in the previous chapter, post-COVID job recovery has been a primary focus of Donald Trump's re-election bid. It is also the area in which Trump will likely face the most pushback from within his own political party, as a growing number of Republican officials are against the idea of another stimulus package.³⁵ Winning a second term will most probably send the message that a smaller pandemic stimulus budget will be enough in order to get the economy back on track.

On China, the Trump administration is expected to continue with its hardline posturing, despite the two countries reaching a tentative phase one trade deal back in December 2019. The most recent indicator of this has come relatively recently, as President Trump stated that his

²⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/9/29/data-v-spin-the-truth-about-trumps-economy>

²⁹ <https://www.epi.org/publication/reshoring-manufacturing-jobs/>

³⁰ <https://www.thebalance.com/trump-s-tax-plan-how-it-affects-you-4113968>

³¹ <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26610>

³² <https://www.donaldtrump.com/media/trump-campaign-announces-president-trumps-2nd-term-agenda-fighting-for-you>

³³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/07/23/report-trump-to-sign-executive-orders-aimed-at-lowering-prescription-drug-costs/#c4080005bffe>

³⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-would-double-down-on-tax-cuts-in-second-term-11601384401>

³⁵ <https://www.vox.com/2020/8/6/21352939/senate-coronavirus-stimulus-republicans-national-debt>

administration will keep applying tariffs on China in its second term, citing that China had broken their agreement.³⁶ After repeatedly referring to COVID-19 as ‘the China virus’ and promising to hold China accountable for the pandemic as well as unfavorable trade practices, it remains to be seen just how far a second term Trump administration will be pushing the issue.

Joe Biden

The former Vice-President has had experience in turning a post-crisis US economy around with the fallout from the 2008 stock market crash, and he has touted his record on the subject multiple times during the Democratic primary process. His plans for the economy have also been the hardest to initially pin down out of all the other Democratic challengers, with some feeling that his policies were too moderate to satisfy the Bernie Sanders-supporting left wing while also being too radical for the old-school moderate Democrats to get on board. After securing the Democratic nomination, however, Joe Biden has put forward a number of policy proposals on how to tackle the economy, from tax policy changes to clean energy initiatives.³⁷ A majority of his economic focus seems to be on revitalizing the middle class through combatting income inequality, expanding healthcare services, creating more opportunities for racial minorities and promoting a greater investment into renewable energy.³⁸

Besides the aforementioned response plan to COVID-19, a Joe Biden presidency will likely focus on reforming the tax system to institute a progressive tax on Americans earning more than \$400,000 a year, imposing sanctions on tax havens and raising the corporate tax from its current %21 to around %28.³⁹ An increasingly popular topic among liberal and conservative voters alike since 2016, the Biden administration will be under intense pressure to at least address the issue in his first term. On healthcare, Joe Biden has stated that expanding Affordable Care Act coverage⁴⁰ (otherwise known as ‘Obamacare’, a key policy of the Obama administration which Donald Trump has repeatedly expressed his desire to repeal) regardless of COVID-19 will benefit the taxpayers in the long run. Additional plans to tackle climate change and a gradual switch to renewable energy have made it so that even though Joe Biden bills himself as a moderate candidate, the economic policies of a Biden White House will undoubtedly include several substantial changes to the US economy. Despite some of Joe Biden’s proposed economic plans being referred to as a ‘war economy’ solution,⁴¹ Wall Street has been increasingly accepting of a potential Biden administration due to his support for a more comprehensive economic stimulus package. To that end, it is expected that the next four years under Joe Biden will see the US federal deficit greatly expanded to make way for long-term COVID-19 recovery policies. However, as the Democrats are generally opposed to increasing the federal deficit, President Biden may look towards deficit-reducing measures in the long term.

Regarding the trade war with China, Biden is expected to step away from Donald Trump’s aggressive stance and pivot towards putting pressure through the use of coalitions and

³⁶ <https://nypost.com/2020/10/08/trump-says-he-will-keep-tariffs-against-china-in-a-second-term/>

³⁷ <https://joebiden.com/joes-vision/>

³⁸ <https://www.investopedia.com/joe-biden-s-economic-plan-save-the-middle-class-4769869>

³⁹ <https://www.marketplace.org/2020/09/18/comparing-bidens-and-trumps-economic-policies/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.axios.com/joe-biden-health-care-affordable-bf305d42-acf7-44e7-acae-013d0f35f3b4.html>

⁴¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2020/10/06/joe-bidens-war-economy-policies-radical-break-status-quo/>

international structures.⁴² Despite hopes on China's part that a Biden presidency might mean a return to more amicable relations between two countries, Biden's similar commitment to bringing back jobs to America, as well as a more hostile stance from the Democratic Party towards what they consider 'authoritarian' states in recent years⁴³ will likely result in a less heated yet ongoing trade dispute.

Immigration

Donald Trump

As the other pillar of his presidential agenda back in 2016, President Trump has spent his first term in office making sweeping changes to the US immigration system. The most obvious example of building 100 miles of steel barriers along the US' southern border aside, Trump has banned nationals of a number of Muslim countries from obtaining visas, ordered the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to carry out raids without warrants, and has placed asylum seekers and other refugees in detention camps where they are often separated from their family members.⁴⁴ Additionally, the administration has cut the immigration resettlement cap to just 18,000 for the 2020 fiscal year, which has been a nearly 79% decrease from the Obama era immigration policy.⁴⁵

The Trump administration's hardline stance of immigration will continue and likely even get stronger if elected for a second term. However, most of these impactful changes were achieved through executive orders and not through legislation, owing to a divided Congress. His administration has also been repeatedly challenged in federal courts, which have so far managed to overturn some of the more radical Trump policies.



In the event of a Trump holdout, where the President keeps his seat and the Senate remains Republican controlled, Trump will most likely double down on using executive action in the next four years. However, this time around the administration will also have the benefit of a conservative-majority Supreme Court and 4 more years of being able to appoint more federal judges, of which he has already appointed over 200.⁴⁶ This will effectively shift the balance of legal power in favor of the Republicans and conservatives for the next four years, and possibly beyond.

One of the top policy priorities for Donald Trump in his second term will be to seek the end of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),⁴⁷ an Obama-era program that allows people who

⁴² <https://www.dw.com/en/joe-biden-economic-plan/a-55022468>

⁴³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/17/senate-democrat-unveil-hawkish-strategy-counter-china-biden-trump-election/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/10/opinion/sunday/trump-immigration-child-separations.html>

⁴⁵ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/26/politics/refugee-cap-historic-low/index.html>

⁴⁶ <https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/april-may-june-2020/trumps-second-term-immigration-agenda/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/21366213/trump-immigration-policy-second-term>

were brought into the US illegally when they were a child to stay longer through renewable delayed action procedures. President Trump has repeatedly stated his disdain for the program and his wishes to replace it with a merit-based one. Thus, a second term will also see the expansion of two pilot programs the Trump administration launched in late 2019: the Prompt Asylum Claim Review (PACR) and the Humanitarian Asylum Review Process (HARP).⁴⁸ The programs, ostensibly designed to fast-track immigration applications from Central and Latin American countries, has been challenged in the courts by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for being purposefully designed in a way to deprive immigrant families of legal counsel and refuse their entry into the US⁴⁹ as an extension of the administration's 'Remain in Mexico' policy.

Joe Biden

Joe Biden's platform on the issue of immigration has been mostly focused on modernizing the immigration system and overturning the majority of changes implemented by the Trump administration, specifically funding for the border wall and the sweeping powers given to ICE.⁵⁰ To that end, a Biden presidency will most likely see the return of several Obama-era policies and the raising of the immigration resettlement cap to previous Obama-era levels. Through executive action, Joe Biden will undoubtedly try and redirect funding from the wall in favor of increased security at ports of entry. The next four years under Biden will also likely see a push for immigration reform that is less restriction-heavy, with a higher focus on addressing the root causes of immigration such as his proposed \$4 billion over four-years program designed to address poverty and violence in Central America, in particular Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.⁵¹ Additionally, a Biden administration will be fast-tracking the citizenship process for agricultural workers⁵² in an effort to fight the exploitation of foreign workers as well as the displacement of American workers.

However, these changes will be easier said than done. Although Biden will be under pressure from the progressive wing of the Democrats to immediately repeal and overturn the majority of Trump's regulatory policies, a number of factors like a potential conservative-heavy Supreme Court, divided Congress and even intra-party differences on the issue are likely to slow down the process. A number of officials have already admitted that the Trump legacy on immigration will continue for the foreseeable future.⁵³ Similarly, a research review by the American Action Forum (AAF) has found that while Biden's immigration plan will most likely lead to increased economic productivity in the medium-to-long run, the campaign currently has no clear plan on how to effectively tackle the Trump-era changes in the current pandemic climate.⁵⁴ The world should expect a messy fight for immigration reform in the coming months under Biden.

While Biden positions himself as the restoration president, he will also have to reckon with the legacy of the Obama-era immigration policies. Despite passing important legislation like DACA, the number of immigrant deportations under Obama as well as his empowering of the current

⁴⁸ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/interlocking-set-policies-us-mexico-border-bars-virtually-all-asylum>

⁴⁹ <https://immigrationimpact.com/2020/03/11/dhs-asylum-programs-pacr-harp/#.X4LS8fkzZPY>

⁵⁰ <https://joebiden.com/immigration/#>

⁵¹ <https://www.cicnews.com/2020/09/how-biden-and-trump-differ-on-immigration-0915720.html#gs.huz544>

⁵² <https://joebiden.com/immigration/>

⁵³ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-biden-2020-immigration-policies/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.americanactionforum.org/print?url=https://www.americanactionforum.org/insight/comparing-trump-and-biden-on-immigration/>

modus operandi of ICE⁵⁵ have been controversial points in his presidency. Critics of Obama have in the past, referring to his administration's deportation of over 2.5 million immigrants, have referred to him as the 'Deporter-in-Chief'. Joe Biden's current focus on bringing back the Obama days with regards to immigration will potentially come under fire from progressives and immigrant-rights groups, who will demand a significant overhaul of the system as well as abolishing ICE – likely leading to a legislative clash between them and the more moderate Biden.⁵⁶

Social Issues

Donald Trump

Coinciding with the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, two major developments promise to significantly shape the social and legal *status quo* of the US in the next four years and beyond. The first has been the ongoing protests around the country since March against police violence and systemic racism, spurred on by the death of black Americans like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Jacob Blake, and echoed by similar demonstrations around the world.⁵⁷ The second is the recent passing of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an icon for women's rights, leading to another opening at the Supreme Court.

So far, President Trump's response to the former has been to denounce the protests as violent, publicly support the police, and generally emphasize a 'law and order' approach.⁵⁸ This has proven to be a controversial, yet effective policy due to the issue quickly dividing the country politically into "Black Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter" (blue meaning the police) camps.⁵⁹ Against the backdrop of continued calls to reform or 'defund' what some in the US consider an overly-militarized police, Donald Trump's second term will likely see an even tougher stance in cracking down against what he calls anti-police violence, as indicated by his willingness to send in the national guard into cities that have had mass protests.⁶⁰ Although he has made statements in favor of looking into ways to reduce chokeholds as general tactic for law enforcement, it is widely expected that the Trump administration will not consider police reform to be a policy priority in a potential second term.

An area where Donald Trump will give much more attention to will be the now-vacant Supreme Court seat in the wake of Justice Ginsburg's passing. Having already confirmed one Justice to the Supreme Court in 2017 with Justice Neil Gorsuch and in 2018 with Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the Trump administration has moved swiftly into looking at potential candidates to replace Justice Ginsburg's seat in a bid to confirm their candidate before the election.⁶¹ The administration's

⁵⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/06/11/angry-that-ice-is-ripping-families-apart-dont-just-blame-trump-blame-clinton-bush-and-obama-too/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/biden-knocks-left-wing-of-democratic-party-we-shouldnt-abolish-ice/ar-BBWu1GR>

⁵⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/10/politics/george-floyd-legacy/index.html>

⁵⁸ <https://www.thenational.ae/world/the-americas/donald-trump-visits-city-rocked-by-anti-police-brutality-protests-1.1071586>

⁵⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/black-lives-matter-protest.html>

⁶⁰ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/trump-national-guard-kenosha-wisconsin-jacob-blake-a9690411.html>

⁶¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/sep/21/trump-name-nominee-ruth-bader-ginsburg>

current candidate Amy Coney Barrett being a conservative judge with a history of opposing abortion rights⁶² and marriage equality⁶³ has made women and sexual minorities alike concerned that a conservative effort to overturn *Roe v. Wade* (Supreme Court decision in favor of abortion



rights), the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and even the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) is imminent. If President Trump manages to confirm Barrett to the Supreme Court before the election, he will have changed the Supreme Court more than most previous presidents. Unlike Democrats, Republicans under Trump have so far resisted calling for an expanded Supreme Court. A second

Trump term will almost certainly involve less legal obstruction from the Supreme Court towards his legislations, as well as exploratory attempts at re-examining the decisions regarding marriage equality and abortion rights.

Joe Biden

Perhaps owing to President Trump's heavy-handed response against the racial justice protests around the country, Joe Biden has comfortably positioned both himself and his running mate Kamala Harris as the only logical choice for those who want criminal justice reform. In his speech on George Floyd's death back in June,⁶⁴ Biden condemned the current administration's approach to race relations and signaled that under his presidency, he will do whatever it takes to pass the necessary reforms in order to reduce the number of black Americans being disproportionately arrested and shot by law enforcement. Currently, one of the big proposals under a potential Biden presidency is Safe, Accountable, Fair, and Effective (SAFE) Justice Act, a relatively new bill focused on reducing federal prison recidivism through education and vocational programs, as well as making the criminal justice process more transparent and data-driven.⁶⁵ Introduced with bipartisan support in 2018 in the state of Virginia, the next 4 years under Biden will most likely see efforts to see it passed and be made into federal law.

Biden has also indicated that the issue of police reform will likely be addressed with the re-introduction of his Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, which he helped introduce back in the 1990's. However, Biden's previous record on race relations has been relatively mixed, and he will likely find himself with a voter base demanding more aggressive action in combatting police violence, such as defunding police unions and heavier sentences for police officers who violate the rules.⁶⁶ For his part, Joe Biden has repeatedly stated that he is not in favor of a blanket police defunding effort, and supports educational and prison reform programs. If President, his stance will either have to change or he will likely face backlash from a Democratic voting bloc that is increasingly younger, non-white and liberal. Although it is expected

⁶² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/25/us/politics/amy-coney-barrett-supreme-court.html>

⁶³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jim-obergefell-alphonso-david-amy-coney-barrett-lgbtq-rights/2020/10/08/41cde2c8-08cd-11eb-9be6-cf25fb429f1a_story.html

⁶⁴ <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/2/21277967/joe-biden-full-speech-george-floyd-death-trump>

⁶⁵ <https://bobbyscott.house.gov/SAFEJusticeAct>

⁶⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/24/opinions/criminal-justice-reform-biden-prashar-hoskins/index.html>

that a Biden White House will be better-positioned to respond to the current social unrest, it is highly unlikely that the protests and police reform efforts will die down under his Presidency.

Regarding the race to fill the Supreme Court, provided that the Republicans under President Trump fail to confirm judge Amy Coney Barrett to the empty seat before the election, a Biden presidency will almost surely nominate their own, most likely moderate Democratic, candidate. Both Biden and Harris have accused the Trump administration of ‘court packing’⁶⁷ and trying to fundamentally change the Supreme Court so close to the election. However, since the Republican Senate currently has enough votes to push through the Supreme Court confirmation hearings,⁶⁸ the chances of judge Barrett being confirmed and Joe Biden having to deal with a solidly-conservative Supreme Court for the next four years are increasing daily. If that happens, the pathway to achieving many of Biden’s agenda goals will likely face increased legal resistance from the highest judicial body in the country. Additionally, the US might still see challenges to previously-settled rulings like the Affordable Care Act and Roe v. Wade. The next weeks will be critical in shaping the next few years.

Foreign Policy

Allies and International Partners

Donald Trump

There is no question that with the last four years of Donald Trump as the President of the United States, the US’ relationship with a number of its international partners have gone through an uncomfortable transformation. In particular, its partnership with the European Union is worthy of note. As its largest trading partner as well as home to the majority of its NATO allies, the US had long enjoyed a relatively close relationship with the EU. Already off to a rocky start with then-candidate Donald Trump’s backing of Brexit and criticizing the EU as “basically a vehicle for Germany” shortly after coming into office,⁶⁹ President Trump’s first term in office saw repeated tensions with Brussels over trade, security cooperation, and the Trump administration’s largely bilateral relationship with Russia as well as China to the exclusion of its multilateral commitments to the US’ allies. Some of the focal points of this deteriorating relationship have been focused on a trade dispute over steel and aluminum imports,⁷⁰ clashing over the Iran nuclear deal sanctions,⁷¹ the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and more generally the US pivoting away from multilateralism towards a more insulated, ‘transactional’ approach in its foreign relations.⁷² Current attitudes in Brussels towards what they perceive as a dismissive and combative administration has brought

⁶⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/election-2020-virus-outbreak-joe-biden-politics-courts-2da741e21e49bec61f9e50a0f4ec5b45>

⁶⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/10/05/yes-senate-republicans-could-still-confirm-barrett-before-election/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/full-transcript-of-interview-with-donald-trump-5d39sr09d>

⁷⁰ <https://lot.dhl.com/timeline-how-the-u-s-eu-trade-dispute-took-shape/>

⁷¹ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-willing-to-maintain-iran-nuclear-deal-risking-rift-with-the-us/>

⁷² <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07036337.2018.1488839>

into question the limits of transatlantic cooperation, a sentiment shared by the Trump White House and reflected in numerous high-ranking diplomatic vacancies.⁷³

Related to President Trump's souring view of the EU, the US-NATO relationship has consequently seen its fair share of tensions since 2016. After Trump rightfully criticized other NATO members for not contributing more towards their defense budget,⁷⁴ his insinuation that the US might not come to a NATO member's aid should they be attacked until they start paying more, which is a violation of NATO's Article 5, has highlighted the Trump administration's unwillingness to honor their international commitments if it does not suit their interests. Although NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has since announced efforts for bigger defense spending contributions as a compromise,⁷⁵ there is unease among the NATO allies over the US' future engagement with the organization.

Similar unease has been felt in the UN. Although the US is the biggest single contributor to the UN and is a member of the P5+1 UN Security Council, President Trump has not shied away from criticizing the organization and questioning its usefulness. Donald Trump's speech at the UN's 73rd General Assembly denouncing globalism, withdrawing the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran, and announcing that the US will be pulling out of the 2015 Paris Climate Accords by November 4, 2020⁷⁶ have all been clear indications that the Trump administration is more than willing to break with the international system the US helped put in place. Particularly regarding the Paris agreement, regardless of whether the agreement presents an effective way of dealing with the rising threat of climate change, the symbolic effect of the US being the one to pull out has been viewed both at home and abroad as a loss for American leadership on an issue that severely needs one.⁷⁷ Indeed, the Trump administration's apparent disregard for other UN bodies like UNESCO, the UN Human Rights Council and in particular the WHO over COVID-19,⁷⁸ are symptomatic of a deeper break with the international system.



One partner that has so far been very happy with the policies of the US under President Trump is Israel. After years of disagreement with President Obama, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu has enjoyed a much closer relationship with the Trump administration, both personally and diplomatically. This was reflected in the US officially recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel,⁷⁹ a move that has severely put the long-running efforts for an Israeli-Palestinian peace

⁷³ <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-eu-strategy-nothing-g7-summit-angela-merkel/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/11/trumps-nato-criticism-is-valid-europe-isnt-spending-enough-on-def.html>

⁷⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-summit-defence-budget-idUSKBN1Y01WY>

⁷⁶ <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/335955-trump-pulls-us-out-of-paris-climate-deal>
⁷⁷ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/planetpolicy/2017/06/01/trumps-paris-agreement-withdrawal-what-it-means-and-what-comes-next/>

⁷⁸ <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/08/24/trump-s-toxic-present-to-united-nations-pub-82575>

⁷⁹ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2017-12-11/pdf/2017-26832.pdf#page=1>

process into disarray. The Trump administration has also brokered multiple peace agreements between Israel and several Arab Gulf countries under the Abraham Accords, paving the way for normalized relations between the US' Middle Eastern ally and its former enemies.⁸⁰

Should Donald Trump manage to secure another term after the November elections, he will have to deal with a circle of allies that is smaller, less inclined to trust or rely on the US, and more willing to emulate President Trump's combative stance in transatlantic relations. European and NATO leaders who hoped that the previous four years under Trump were temporary lapse in policy direction will be severely disappointed, and will want to start looking further inward for solutions on security and trade, as evidenced by the push by European leaders like France's President Macron and Germany's Chancellor Merkel on creating a joint EU armed force.⁸¹ While the sheer scale of US military involvement in Europe and NATO is unlikely to make that particular vision a reality for many years to come, it is nonetheless an indicator of the current climate in the minds of the US' allies. Questions on how to respond to four more years of Trump is likely to divide EU members, with Central European members like Hungary and Poland firmly supporting President Trump⁸² and more Western members continuing their critical approach. Germany taking on an even greater role in guiding EU-NATO policy will most likely gain increased traction; as both a financial powerhouse and one of the most dominant members in the EU at shaping external relations, the US and Germany may find themselves at greater odds in the coming years.

To compensate for the next four years of US isolationism, NATO will have to reconsider their approach and develop greater strategic cooperation regarding Russia, China, and the Middle East. Worries among the alliance members that a continued US disengagement from the world stage will likely allow Russia and China to fill the power vacuum in a more permanent way will have renewed urgency.⁸³ On trade, US allies will more than likely have to prepare for an extremely aggressive Trump administration. It is widely expected that Donald Trump will double down on his efforts to dismantle several aspects of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and renegotiate its standing trade deals.⁸⁴ The escalating trade tensions between the EU and the US over new tariffs⁸⁵ is just the precursor to the more comprehensive disputes the US is likely to have with Europe and beyond. Finally on Israel, a second term Trump administration is expected to continue to empower Israel diplomatically and militarily. As part of its great shift from the MENA region into Asia, the US' strategy will be to keep Israel as a bulwark against Iran. Sharing similarly hawkish attitudes towards Iran, both President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu will want to cooperate and develop Israel's regional partnerships. Before the Abraham Accords, Israel had virtually no allies in the region besides the US. Now, thanks to the Accords, that situation may be experiencing a gradual change.

Joe Biden

At first glance, a Biden presidency is likely to ease some of the tensions in the US' current

⁸⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/09/winners-losers/616364/>

⁸¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/13/merkel-joins-macron-in-calling-for-a-real-true-european-army>

⁸² <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungarian-minister-we-prefer-trump-team-over-obama-team/>

⁸³ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/02/20/how-europe-views-transatlantic-relations-ahead-of-2020-u.s.-election-pub-81049>

⁸⁴ <https://www.wita.org/blogs/us-europe-trade-election/>

⁸⁵ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/24/trump-biden-trade-war-europe/>

relationship with its alliance network and see a partial restoration of its former role of being actively involved in transatlantic affairs. Joe Biden has a long history of being considered a ‘transatlanticist’, and his campaign’s stated policy priorities emphasize the need to restore US credibility and leadership in the eyes of its allies. It is widely expected that a potential President Biden will bring the US back into the Paris Climate Accords, ease up on the brewing trade war between the US and the EU, and reset the US’ current relations with the WHO and the WTO.⁸⁶ Biden’s words in the 2019 Munich Security conference, promising that the US “will be back” in the world stage⁸⁷ has elevated hopes in the transatlantic community for a glorious American comeback.



The reality, however, is much more complicated and less promising. Though Donald Trump has certainly exacerbated the fraying of the US’ relationship with its allies and partners, he is merely a symptom of the underlying conditions, not the cause. The post-Cold War system of alliances and partnerships that were set up by the US to contain Russia and which helped create both the EU and NATO has been in a state of transition since before Donald Trump came into power. The US

shift towards Asia and the Pacific to combat the rising influence of China has brought with it a gradual pivot away from the EU and the Middle East.⁸⁸ As the US grows increasingly less reliant on the Middle East due to its shale gas reserves, it is also growing less reliant on having to prioritize European engagement as a way of projecting power unto the Middle East.⁸⁹ This economic and military shift in US policy priority is unlikely to be affected in the long term, regardless of which candidate ends up being in office. Thus, it is also unlikely that a Biden presidency will be willing to go back to the US policies of old. Biden might even consider keeping Trump’s policy of withdrawing from certain international organizations if the terms of re-entry prove disadvantageous enough. This is reflected in many of the foreign policy stances of Joe Biden: like Trump, President Biden will likely demand greater military contribution from its NATO allies and will also be opposed to China’s influence on trading and technology sharing with Europe.⁹⁰ The policy shift towards Asia will also mean that a President Biden may be more amenable to keeping the Trump administration’s policies with regards to Israel. The gradually increasing scope of the Abraham Accords may eventually evolve into some semblance of diplomatic stability in the region, a prospect that Biden will not want to jeopardize. Although he has stated that he disagrees with some of Israel’s current policies and President Trump recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Joe Biden has so far shied away from any significant criticism of Israel.⁹¹ Because the Middle East will not be the primary focus of Joe Biden, he is also expected to keep heavily supporting Israel while simultaneously redoubling the US’ efforts to broker additional deals with Israel’s neighbors in order to isolate any potential threats from the region.

⁸⁶ https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_a_biden_victory_could_reset_transatlantic_relations

⁸⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/16/politics/biden-showcases-foreign-policy-munich/index.html>

⁸⁸ <https://www.ft.com/content/1f3dab26-346c-11e9-bd3a-8b2a211d90d5>

⁸⁹ <https://isdpr.eu/publication/shale-gas-key-us-asia-pivot-republished/>

⁹⁰ <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-old-transatlantic-us-eu-relationship-aint-coming-back-joe-biden-donald-trump/>

⁹¹ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-president-biden-would-likely-take-less-combative-approach-on-israel-than-obama/>

The distinguishing factor of a Biden presidency will be one of tone and reliability. Most expectations foresee an almost-immediate shift in dialogue between the US and its international allies. Although Biden will be pursuing some of the same policies that Trump has put forward, he will likely prioritize building coalitions instead of acting unilaterally. Whether this change in tone and the desire for a renewed partnership will be reciprocated in the long term by its allies, who have grown accustomed to disagreeing with the US over the past four years, will be the true test of President Biden.

Rivals

Donald Trump

With regards to the US' traditional rivals like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea, both President Trump's preference for transactional relations and willingness to stand alone has been on display during his first term. Despite reports from the then-FBI Director James Comey and multiple national intelligence officers⁹² that there were concrete efforts by Russia to influence the 2016 elections, President Trump has repeatedly downplayed these concerns and stressed the importance of a friendlier relationship with Russia.⁹³ In 2018, President Trump called for Russia to be admitted back to the G-7,⁹⁴ and praised President Putin's leadership in their formal meeting in Helsinki. Trump's personal affinity for President Putin and several of his campaign officials' indirect ties to high-ranking Russian officials have been the basis of a series of investigations throughout his first term in office, culminating with the Mueller report which stated that although there was clear evidence of Russian interference, the evidence was inconclusive over whether the Trump campaign actively strategized with Russian officials.⁹⁵ For many, the administration's potential ties to Russia has been a cloud hanging over Donald Trump's presidency ever since. President Trump's desire for a better relationship, however, has not stopped Russia and the US to continue to repeatedly clash over each other's policies on issues like Syria, Iran and the shape of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START).⁹⁶ Set up in 2010, the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty has played an important role in getting the US and Russia to cooperate on disarmament. With its expiration deadline closing and calls to renew the treaty growing, the Trump administration first announced the US' withdrawal from the previous Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty⁹⁷ and then recently proposed to renegotiate the New START towards building a multilateral framework that includes China, creating a diplomatic deadlock and straining relations between the three powers.⁹⁸

⁹² https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf

⁹³ <https://www.ft.com/content/70353a38-88c5-11e8-bf9e-8771d5404543>

⁹⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-trump-some-fear-the-end-of-the-world-order/2018/06/08/d6026dde-6b44-11e8-bf8c-f9ed2e672adf_story.html

⁹⁵ <https://www.justice.gov/storage/report.pdf>

⁹⁶ <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-10/news/us-russia-hit-impasse-new-start>

⁹⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/10/trump-withdraw-inf-treaty-why/573715/>

⁹⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/13/politics/new-start-us-russia-comments/index.html>

Although relations between the US and China have primarily revolved around the ongoing trade war, it has been by no means the only significant development. Heavily opposed to the influence of Chinese technology companies in Europe, President Trump has been severely critical of both China and the EU, and has repeatedly threatened to purge Chinese influence out of Europe's mobile networks.⁹⁹ Regarding China's treatment of the Uyghur Muslims in its Xinjiang province, the administration signed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, which imposed several tiers of sanctions on foreign individuals and entities related to China's mass internment practices, and subsequently closed down China's consulate in Houston, Texas for spying on the US.¹⁰⁰ Trump's aggressive policies on unilaterally trying to curtail China has had significant repercussions on a global scale.



On Iran, President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, implementation of a new sanctions regime, and his subsequent attack on the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani¹⁰¹ has demonstrated his administration's hawkish stance on the Middle Eastern power. Additionally, the administration declared Iran's Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organization,¹⁰² and promised severe trade sanctions against countries who continue to trade with Iran. Relations between Iran and the US have consequently been at its lowest since perhaps the 1978 Iranian revolution. A harsh critic of President Obama's temperate policy towards Iran even before he was a candidate, President Trump's actions can be seen through his personal desire to reverse Obama's legacy.

On the other hand, Donald Trump's dislike of President Obama's policies had the reverse effect on the US' relations with North Korea. One of Trump's first major acts as President with regards to international diplomacy was to break with previous White House stance on a sanctions regime. Despite initially threatening the North Korea's Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un with 'fire and fury', Trump subsequently arranged a much-publicized summit with the North Korean leader to discuss a new chapter in US-DPKR relations and denuclearization. Issuing a joint statement after the 2018 Singapore Summit,¹⁰³ both countries were initially optimistic in taking the first step to normalizing relations. Coupled with President Trump's supportive statements on Kim Jong-un's leadership, there was hope in the international community that this rapprochement could lead to a significant shift in one of the world's most notorious rogue states. That hope has not come to pass. Shifting policy priorities on the part of the Trump administration and lack of follow up, coupled with statements from Pyongyang on how the summit was essentially an 'empty promise'¹⁰⁴ has reset the relations back to its previous state.

⁹⁹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/finance/trump-warns-china-eu-over-unfair-trade-practices/26465>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.vox.com/2020/8/26/21368750/trump-foreign-policy-plan-2020>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/50982493>

¹⁰² <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/u-s-declares-irans-guard-force-a-terrorist-organization>

¹⁰³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/12/875539237/2-years-after-singapore-summit-u-s-north-korea-relations-back-to-square-1>

A second Trump term will see the President continue to aggressively push against Chinese influence with renewed focus. On this issue, he will be on firmer ground electorally, as over 66% of Americans now view China as a critical threat to the US thanks to COVID-19 and its trade practices.¹⁰⁵ Even going as far as to say that a complete decoupling of the Chinese and US economies is under consideration, President Trump's volatile approach to dealing with China is expected to be his primary international focus. Similarly, President Trump's stance towards Iran is unlikely to change in his second term. After pulling out of the JCPoA and imposing some of the heaviest set of sanctions imaginable, a second term the Trump administration's current strategy has nowhere else to go besides staying the course¹⁰⁶ barring direct airstrikes (a growing possibility). Although Iran will continue to be hurt under both the sanctions and the devastating effects of COVID-19, its own inflexible strategy on using US aggression to unite the country behind the Ayatollah regime is likely to see no change. Likewise, on North Korea, a second term Trump White House is more likely to use their previous attempt as a symbolic victory than to engage in another round of substantive talks.¹⁰⁷ Unless relations in the Korean Peninsula were to dramatically deteriorate in a way that would affect US security, Donald Trump will likely continue his policy of keeping quiet on the North Korea front.

Assessing the future of US-Russian relations under President Trump is significantly harder. The convoluted strategy of the Trump administration in its first term regarding Russia has even led some to question whether President Trump is trying to provoke another nuclear arms race between the two powers through its actions on the INF and New START disarmament programs.¹⁰⁸ Whether that's truly the case, the current tensions between the two countries are likely to gradually escalate independent of nuclear disarmament. The US and Russia have too many conflicting policy priorities for Donald Trump's wish of friendlier relations with the Putin administration to become a reality.¹⁰⁹ With that being said, Trump might allow Russia to continue to fill out the power vacuum left by the US in the Middle East, as it allows Trump to fully focus his administration's attention towards China. Overall, Trump's Russia policy in his second term will likely consist of balancing long-term US-Russian strategic divergence with Trump's personal short-term goals on China.

Joe Biden

If there is one foreign policy development that is sure to come with a Biden administration, it will be a clearer stance on Russia. Stating that he saw Russia as an opponent compared to seeing China as a competitor during the campaign,¹¹⁰ Joe Biden is likely to pivot away from Donald Trump's transactional approach and reinstate a more values-based policy. Consequently, President Biden will be forced to walk the thin line between punishing Russia for its US electoral and policy interference, while also keeping them on the table for arms control and balancing China. As a strong supporter of NATO, Joe Biden will likely direct his efforts on putting more international pressure through its allies. He also has not ruled out more aggressive kinds of responses,

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/04/21/u-s-views-of-china-increasingly-negative-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://peacediplomacy.org/2020/08/07/iran-options-second-term-trump/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/donald-trump-north-korea-second-term-policy-autopilot-169018>

¹⁰⁸ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/31/trump-is-pushing-the-united-states-toward-nuclear-anarchy/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/08/what-was-trump-s-russia-plan-pub-74965>

¹¹⁰ <https://nypost.com/2020/09/18/joe-biden-calls-russia-an-opponent-and-china-a-competitor/>

especially with regards to cyber-attacks.¹¹¹ It is therefore not hard to assume that Biden's tougher rhetoric and the threat of covert or multilateral responses will initially further strain relations between the US and Russia. Additionally, Biden's personal distaste for Putin, whom he has called a dictator, is reciprocated by Putin's statements on having noted Biden's 'anti-Russia rhetoric'.¹¹² This clash of personalities under potential Biden presidency will be another distinguishing factor.



As discussed in previous chapters, the Biden administration's policy priorities on China are unlikely to deviate significantly from that of the Trump administration. Throughout his campaign, Biden has displayed similar tough stances on bringing back jobs to America, curtailing China's trade practices and safeguarding the Western tech supply chains from Chinese companies.¹¹³ If Joe Biden

becomes president, he will have to decide on what to do with the tariffs the Trump administration put in place, as well as whether to escalate the sanctions on Chinese officials on their crackdown of Hong Kong and the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang. While many expect Biden's tone to be less confrontational than Trump's, President Biden will likely keep a majority of the tariffs and sanctions, while also putting pressure on Beijing to renegotiate the trade deal they made with Trump back in December 2019.¹¹⁴

On Iran, while Biden would most likely want to see a gradual US return to the JCPoA framework, it is doubtful that the situation could go back to its pre-Trump state. The mood in the Iranian government is indifferent, with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif stating that US aggression towards Iran will not change regardless of who wins the election.¹¹⁵ However, Biden has insisted that there is a smarter and more diplomatic way of dealing with Iran.¹¹⁶ Whether that entails a reset of diplomatic relations, easing of the sanctions or the unlikely prospect of the US rejoining the JCPoA, is currently unclear. While a Biden administration would ultimately be more open to diplomatic overtures with Iran, Biden's hands may be tied in the short-term.

With regards to North Korea, the Biden White House is likely to be less inclined towards diplomacy and supportive of tighter sanctions. Widely expected to follow the Obama era policy of diplomatically and economically isolating North Korea into submission, the Biden administration might ultimately be frustrated in their attempts by their South Korean partners. President Moon Jae-in, who played a crucial part in Trump's summit with Kim Jong-un, will likely continue to push for more engagement with their belligerent neighbor.¹¹⁷ As things stand, President Biden will likely spend his first term in office closely monitoring North Korean proliferation attempts and attempt to use South Korea's diplomatic overtures to secure even stricter terms.

¹¹¹ <https://www.axios.com/biden-russia-policy-putin-d8084624-ce24-425f-8718-84c15cfb3bfd.html>

¹¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/7/putin-says-he-has-noted-joe-bidens-sharp-anti-russian-rhetoric>

¹¹³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/03/biden-is-now-a-china-hawk-with-limits/>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/09/29/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/joe-biden-china-policy-us/>

¹¹⁵ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/trump-or-biden-iran-weighs-the-pros-and-cons-of-closely-watched-vote/>

¹¹⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/09/13/opinions/smarter-way-to-be-tough-on-iran-joe-biden/index.html>

¹¹⁷ <https://thediomat.com/2020/06/moon-jae-in-holds-on-to-his-dream-of-north-korea-diplomacy/>

The US-Turkey Relationship

Donald Trump

Although relations between the US and Turkey have been gradually souring for years, 2016 and onwards has seen a whirlwind of developments that may have fundamentally changed how the two NATO powers see each other. In the immediate aftermath of the failed coup attempt by the terrorist Gülenist organization, relations between Turkey and the US became strained to the point that President Erdoğan publicly accused the US of being the mastermind behind the coup attempt.¹¹⁸ Reflecting President Erdoğan's remarks on the coup and the US positioning itself against Turkey's interests in Syria, Turkish public opinion on the US was even more negative than before.¹¹⁹ The election of Donald Trump was viewed by many in the Turkish government as a potential reset, and although the mood in both countries' governments was initially positive, Turkey's relationship with the US has perhaps reached its lowest point under the Trump administration. From the diplomatic crisis over Qatar¹²⁰ to the brutal killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, US support of Saudi Arabia over Turkey has led to hostile rhetoric on both sides. Owing to this current misalignment, a diplomatic clash over the Turkey-based American pastor Andrew Brunson, Turkey's turn towards Russia for its S-400 missile systems as well as its continued offensive in northern Syria resulted in Turkey being officially kicked out of the F-35 joint strike fighter program and many in the US government pushing for comprehensive economic sanctions¹²¹ which has put significant pressure on the Turkish economy. Although President Trump has at times expressed his personal admiration for President Erdoğan and the two leaders have often exchanged numerous personal phone calls, the current situation has made cooperation between the two countries a mixed prospect.



In his second term, President Trump is expected to be an unpredictable ally for Turkey. On the one hand, the economic sanctions over Turkey's Syrian offensive as well as its dismal record on human rights and freedom of press are likely to continue, if not develop even further. The Erdoğan government is very unpopular in the eyes of US lawmakers,¹²² and although President Trump is personally close with Erdoğan, he will be unwilling to advocate heavily on Turkey's behalf. On the other hand, Trump's unpredictability and transactional nature may continue to open up new opportunities for Turkey's strategic interests. The administration's sudden withdrawal from Syria in 2019¹²³ has allowed Turkey to launch its military campaign against the PYD militias, which

¹¹⁸ <https://www.voanews.com/europe/erdogan-accuses-us-political-coup-attempt>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/03/world/europe/turkey-coup-erdogan-fethullah-gulen-united-states.html>

¹²⁰ <https://www.voanews.com/usa/us-official-accuses-turkey-pushing-extreme-islamist-ideology>

¹²¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/10/us-lawmakers-move-punish-turkey-buying-russian-missile-system-s400/>

¹²² [https://edam.org.tr/en/the-uncertain-future-of-turkish-american-relations](https://edam.org.tr/en/the-uncertain-future-of-turkish-american-relations/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=the-uncertain-future-of-turkish-american-relations)

¹²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/07/us-withdrawal-from-syria-leaves-fate-of-isis-fighters-and-families-in-detention-uncertain>

Turkey considers to be the Syrian arm of the terrorist organization PKK. In addition, the Trump administration's decision to continue purchasing F-35's from Turkey despite Ankara's recent acquisition of the Russian S-400 systems and the US' official policy of phasing Turkey out from the F-35 program belie a continued desire for military coordination.¹²⁴ Trump's second term commitment towards stopping the 'endless wars' in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region will likely be afforded greater focus in his second term, which may mean less direct US involvement in the region and more breathing room for Turkey to operate in. Additionally, President Trump's disregard for his transatlantic alliance with NATO currently works to Turkey's benefit, since it has increasingly come under fire from other NATO members over Syria and its acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile defense system. As a second term Trump White House continues to pull away from NATO, Turkey may find ways of at least attempting to repair its frayed relationship with the US.

Joe Biden

Whereas Donald Trump poses continued challenge for Turkey as well as small avenues of opportunity, it is widely expected that Joe Biden will prove a more sustained and organized obstacle. As a transatlanticist and a harsh critic of what he sees as Turkey's 'autocratic' trajectory in recent years, Joe Biden has made repeated statements condemning Turkey for its actions against the Kurds in Northern Syria and stated that he will seek to empower President Erdoğan's political opponents during his term as President.¹²⁵ Given Turkey's *persona non grata* status in the US Congress as well as its increasingly isolated position in NATO, a Biden administration is likely to go unchallenged in their efforts put even greater pressure on Turkey by threatening additional economic or diplomatic sanctions. However, this would likely result in further straining the relationship, as President Erdoğan's confrontational and incendiary style of leadership may be brought out in full force against President Biden if additional sanctions are announced. Much of the current tensions between the two countries has its foundations in the Obama era administration's policies regarding the MENA region, and while Biden ostensibly being the Obama legacy candidate remains popular with the US' international partners, it will prove to be an undesirable label in the eyes of the Turkish government. Signs of future diplomatic rows are already underway in the developing situation in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea: although Donald Trump has so far avoided a direct clash with President Erdoğan and has urged for easing tensions with Greece and Greek Cyprus,¹²⁶ a potential President Biden may take this opportunity to side with Greece over Turkish natural gas drilling efforts and seek to force a Turkish retreat through its renewed engagement with NATO. On the other hand, there still remains hope for improved relations under a Biden administration. A Biden presidency is widely expected to not prioritize expanding the military budget and as such, may prefer to keep a state of semi-cooperation with Turkey on the F-35 program and with effective diplomacy from both sides, might eventually be open to re-admitting Turkey into the fold.

¹²⁴ <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/10/01/us-keep-buying-f-35-parts-turkey-despite-purchase-ban.html>

¹²⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-biden-turkey-idUSKCN25B0XS>

¹²⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-greece-usa-trump-idUSKBN25M2RG>

Summary

Overall, it is clear that the upcoming US elections will bring about comprehensive changes to the US' domestic and foreign policies. This analysis has tried to contextualize the current climate with regards to a range of issues, and then contrasted each presidential candidate's position as well as likely future developments. While the analysis makes no claims to being a predictor of future events, it nevertheless has tried to infer potential policies through a number of factors such as the candidates' previous statements, current long-term US governmental policy, and the constantly changing geo-political situation in the realm of international affairs. As the analysis has tried to show, it remains unclear whether which candidate would be uniformly better with regards to US policy; For instance, while President Joe Biden might be better-positioned to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the US, his policies regarding China are not fundamentally different from that of Donald Trump. Likewise, while President Trump's distaste for multilateralism may frustrate his EU and NATO allies, it is arguably a better fit for the US' current relationship with Turkey. In the end, both potential Presidents will continue to put US interests first, albeit in different methods and tones. With less than two weeks to go before the election, whoever wins the race for the Oval Office will decide on the policies of the most powerful country on Earth. The more information the world has on the mindset of each candidate with regards to policy priority, the better they will be able to position themselves.