



A Guide to Issues in the 2020 Presidential Election

The 2020 presidential election might be one of the most decisive in American political history. American voters will go to the polls or their mailboxes to cast ballots for two presidential candidates: incumbent President Donald T. Trump, Republican, and Democratic nominee Joseph R. Biden, Jr., the 47th vice president of the United States from 2009 to 2017 and U.S. Senator from Delaware from 1973 to 2009.

The contrast between the two candidates and their parties is stark on every issue. This summer the country was torn apart by rioting and looting in major cities. An estimated \$2 billion of property has been destroyed. Even small and mid-sized towns such as Kenosha, Wisconsin and Lancaster, Pennsylvania experienced mobs looting and burning buildings. Trump has hit hard on the law and order issue, and in late August the polls began to tighten for Trump, which earlier in the summer gave Biden a wide margin. These riots came after much of the country was locked down because of Covid-19. As a result of the lockdown, unemployment shot up and countless small businesses went bankrupt.

This *Mindszenty Report* outlines major policy issues dividing the candidates.

The Economy, Taxes and Regulation

Both candidates are campaigning on reviving the economy. Biden is calling for higher taxes on the wealthy; Trump advocates further lowering on taxes on working families, the middle class and corporations, and promoting economic growth. Biden wants to rescind Trump's deregulatory orders.

Biden rolled out his economic plan on July 9 in Dunmore, Pennsylvania. He calls for increasing the income tax on individuals making more than \$400,000 a year and raising the corporate tax rate to 28 percent from the current 21 percent. He blasted "shareholder capitalism," declaring that "Wall Street bankers and CEOs did not build America."¹ He pledged to repeal President Trump's Tax Cuts and Jobs Act and return the top individual income tax rate to 39.6 percent. He would

spend the alleged additional revenues on infrastructure projects, while moving the U.S. economy to net-zero greenhouse emissions. He supports a carbon tax on energy and raising the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Biden also calls for reinstating regulations on health care, labor and energy that were eliminated by Trump. Biden's regulations and tax proposals are estimated by Casey Mulligan, a University of Chicago economist, to fall primarily on lower-income households. The lowest quintile (fifth) would bear a cost equal to 15.3 percent of their income, through lower wages and higher prices. Mulligan estimates that the Biden policies would cost the highest-income quintile only 2.2 percent of their income.²

President Trump stands behind his first-term tax cuts, which included substantial relief for small business employers. He supports cutting payroll taxes as a way to stimulate hiring. He has promised to offer tax credits to U.S. companies relocating manufacturing facilities from China back to the U.S. He wants to strip federal contracts from companies that outsource work to China. He told a campaign rally in Mankato, Minnesota, "We built the greatest economy in the history of the world and now I have to do it again."³

Energy Policy

Biden aligns himself with the Democratic Party position that climate change represents one of the greatest threats to the world, along with racial injustice, the Covid-19 pandemic and an economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 shutdown. Biden calls for an investment of \$2 trillion on energy, for such projects as a carbon-free electric power grid by 2035 using renewable solar and wind power, and providing cities of more than 100,000 people with zero-emission public transportation like light rail, buses and infrastructure for bicyclists. His plan projects a million new jobs in the U.S. auto industry by incentivizing the switch to electric-powered vehicles. Disadvantaged communities are to receive 40 percent of overall spending on clean air and infrastructure upgrades. He wants to

create a Civilian Climate Corps to employ thousands of people on public-works projects such as restoring wetlands.⁴

While Biden has not formally endorsed the Democratic Party call for the transformative Green New Deal, his policies show that he is behind this plan. He calls for executive and congressional action to overturn Trump's deregulatory actions, including by re-imposing gasoline standards on the automobile industry. After advocating a ban on fracking for oil and gas during the primaries, Biden reversed himself as poll results appeared to be narrowing in Pennsylvania.

President Trump's energy policies have placed great emphasis on the role of energy in fostering economic growth. His energy program has relied on deregulation as well as investment in renewable energy. Last year the United States became a petroleum exporter. The energy sector is more diversified; gas emissions are down; liquefied gas exports have increased five-fold under his administration with deliveries being made to 38 countries; coal exports have increased; and through the One Federal Decision Executive Order and other regulatory reforms, renewable capacity has continued to increase.⁵

Trump proposes to increase and update the electric grid and energy infrastructure, which his administration believes will make renewable energy production more cost-effective.⁶ Both in 2016 and in his re-election campaign, he has been clear on opposing a fracking ban; supporting a gas pipeline from Canada; promoting national energy independence; and pursuing energy policies that promote national economic interests.

Health Care Policy

During the primaries, Biden supported expanding ObamaCare and came out against Medicare for All, asking rival Bernie Sanders how he expected to pay for his plan. At the same time, Biden said his administration would welcome a "Medicare-like option as a public option." He advocates providing automatic enrollment in Medicaid for those who qualify.⁷ During the Democratic debates he endorsed automatic health insurance for undocumented aliens. He has called for expanding Medicare by lowering the eligibility age from 65 to 60. Estimates are that this expansion would cost \$200 billion over the next ten years. He proposes to substantially increase federal subsidies for ObamaCare exchange insurance plans, estimated to cost \$2.2 trillion over a decade.⁸

President Trump has not tackled health care reform. In his first year in office, health care reform failed to make it out of the Republican-controlled House of Representatives as conservative House members raised concerns about the duration of federal subsidies of state Medicaid payments. Trump has rolled out a number of executive orders on drug prices.

Health care reform presents both candidates with a thorny problem. Medicare is in serious financial trouble. Part A, which covers in-patient care, is funded predominantly by payroll tax revenue. Expenditures have been outpacing revenue. It is estimated that by 2024 the net assets of the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund, which covers in-patient care (Part A), will be exhausted.

Abortion and Religious Freedom

The contrast between Biden and Trump on the abortion issue is exceptionally sharp. Biden, who calls himself a Catholic, has withdrawn his support for the 43-year-old Hyde Amendment, which bans federal funding for most abortions. He explained that when he supported the Hyde Amendment in the past, there was enough private money funding abortion, but that is no longer the case. "I can't justify leaving millions of women without access to the care they need and the ability to exercise their constitutionally protected right," he said.⁹

Biden has not explicitly expressed support for or opposition to late-term abortions. His running mate Kamala Harris and the Democratic Party want to extend "reproductive rights" to include late-term abortion. Biden has promised that his administration will nominate judges based on their pro-choice views.

President Trump has hit hard on pro-life issues. During the 2020 Republican National Convention, Trump observed that "Democrat leaders talk about moral decency, but they have no problem with stopping a baby's beating heart in the ninth month of pregnancy. ... All children, born and unborn, have a God-given right to life." He placed pro-life issues and defense of religious freedom on his list of top priorities in his second term. His first term has included numerous pro-life executive actions, many of which were summarized in the August 2019 *Mindszenty Report*. In January 2020 he was the first sitting U.S. president to attend the annual March for Life in Washington, DC.

In a letter to pro-life leaders on September 3, Trump committed to pushing for fully defunding Planned Parenthood and passing a "Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protective Act" to ban late-term abortion. In the letter he promised to nominate constitutionalist judges. He stated that if he is re-elected "we have another four years to fight in the trenches for unborn children and their mothers."¹⁰

Trump's strong support of religious freedom has been reflected in his speeches on both foreign and domestic policy. In announcing the normalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates in late August, Trump noted that "Christians have been persecuted by some countries, in particular the Middle East. If you look at the way Christians have been treated in some countries, it's beyond disgraceful."¹¹

Biden's statements about religious freedom have focused on the need for tolerance and understanding. Yet Biden criticized the Supreme Court ruling granting Catholic nuns and other religious objectors to birth control an exemption from the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate. He promised to restore the Obama-Biden policy on this mandate.¹²

Trump has appointed two conservative Supreme Court justices and, as of this writing, was about to nominate a third to replace the late pro-abortion Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Housing, Guns, Immigration, Policing

In housing policy, Biden wants to diversify housing in the suburbs by insisting that federal funds be directed to building and supporting public housing in middle-class neighborhoods. Trump opposes this view.¹³ In education policy, Biden opposes school choice programs, while Trump strongly supports school choice. On gun control, Biden has endorsed a federal licensing program, the repeal of a federal law that makes it harder to sue gun manufacturers, a plan to limit how many guns one person can buy in a month, federal regulations for gun owners on storage of weapons, and a mandatory gun buyback program.¹⁴

On immigration, Biden and Harris promise that within the first 100 days after taking office, Biden would revoke Trump's declaration to build the border wall, rescind various travel and asylum bans, raise the current ceiling on refugees to 125,000 (even surpassing Obama levels), fast-track citizenship for agricultural workers, and eliminate limits on employment-based green cards for foreign workers.¹⁵ Biden would freeze deportations for his first 100 days in office, restore the "catch and release" system during reviews of asylum claims, reinstate the contested Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and "create a roadmap to citizenship" for "11 million people."

The law and order issue – arguably the decisive issue at the moment – sharply divides the candidates. Belatedly, in September, Biden and Harris publicly condemned looting and property destruction by distinguishing peaceful from violent protesters. At the same time, they did not back away from their stance that America is riddled with "systemic racism."

On July 8, when asked in an interview on the digital media site NowThis News whether "we can redirect some of the [police] funding," Biden responded, "Yes, absolutely." In September, however, his campaign denied he had ever supported defunding the police. On September 3, Biden's campaign launched a new ad promoting the narrative of systemic racism in policing and promising to "hold police accountable." "Why, in this nation, do black Americans wake up knowing they can lose their life in the course of

just living their life?" Biden intoned. Later he tweeted: "This is our moment to root out systemic racism."¹⁶

President Trump's call for law and order has been consistent. He has offered mayors and governors the assistance of the National Guard. His Justice Department is cracking down on violent protesters in the Black Lives Matter and Antifa movements.

Foreign Policy

The candidates exhibit pronounced differences on foreign policy. President Trump has pursued what he called in the 2016 campaign an America First foreign policy. His successes in foreign policy have surprised many of his critics. His administration brokered historic agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recognizing Israel; he negotiated a trade deal with China and negotiations are continuing; he imposed new sanctions on Iran and Russia; he took out Iranian terrorist General Qassem Soleimani; he has scaled back troop deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan; he pressured successfully for NATO countries to pay more of NATO expenses; and he has ordered the drawdown of 12,000 American troops stationed in Germany. He withdrew from the Paris climate agreement. He moved to withdraw U.S. funding from the World Health Organization (WHO) after it defended China's appalling handling of Covid-19.

Biden promises to reverse some of these policies. If elected, he says he will recommit to the Paris climate agreement the day after his election. He will restore funding to the WHO. He is committed to hosting a summit of the world democracies to "put strengthening democracy back on the global stage."¹⁷ Otherwise he declines to provide specifics. "It would be wise not to assert any specific agenda at the outset," he acknowledged in a speech.

Harris: The Wild Card

Biden's selection of Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate presents a wild card in the race. Biden is 77 years old and shows his age in startling public comments. His campaign has consisted largely of reading from a teleprompter in his home. If he wins, Biden will enter the White House as the oldest man ever to become president. Harris has the potential to become the most powerful vice president ever. Both Biden and Harris have referred to the "Harris-Biden administration."

Her campaign speeches bring a different tone to Biden's presentation of himself as a unifier. For example, in a speech at George Washington University on August 28, she stirred the pot: "We also see pain, hurt, and destruction in the aftermath of yet another Black man shot by police. Jacob Blake was shot seven times in the back in broad daylight

in front of his three young sons,” Harris said. “People are rightfully angry and exhausted. And after the murders of Breonna and George and Ahmaud and so many others, it’s no wonder people are taking to the streets. And I support them.”¹⁸ While Harris distinguished violent looters and rioters from peaceful protesters, her speech emphasized anger.

This guide to Trump’s and Biden’s stances on policy issues in fairness should include Harris’s support for Medicare for All, free health care for undocumented aliens, the Green New Deal, late-term abortion, abolishing the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE), defunding the police and impeaching or criminally prosecuting President Trump, as well as her vociferous attacks on federal court nominees for their Catholic religious affiliation. Biden is trying to come across as a likable centrist candidate who will unify the country. But Harris’s poor performance as a presidential candidate – she withdrew in December 2019, well before any primary contests – showed that even solidly Democratic voters did not find her likable, a centrist or a unifier.

Competing Visions for America

T Trump and Biden offer vividly contrasting visions for the nation. Biden hopes that the Trump administration will be a disruptive blip in domestic and foreign policy – so that America can return to the mission of transforming the world according to Barack Obama. Trump, too, wants transformative policies – but to right the course of what he sees as a nation headed off the cliff.

The vote in November – whenever it is finally counted – will decide what vision America will pursue. The future of the nation is at stake.

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The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by

Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation

7800 Bonhomme Ave.

St. Louis, MO 63105

Phone 314-727-6279 Fax 314-727-5897

Subscription rate: \$25 per year

Outside the U.S.A. \$35

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