



BY DAVID BOAZ

EDITORIAL

New Faces in Power, Enduring Principles

People often ask what a change in administration will mean for us at the Cato Institute. Obviously, every new president and every change in Congress will mean some shift in which of our ideas are most likely to advance in the policy process.

Some nonprofits find that their funding and membership grow in inverse proportion to the friendliness of the new administration. Conservative groups crowed about doubling their mailing lists in the first year of the Barack Obama presidency. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported that its membership quadrupled in the first 15 months following Donald Trump's election and that its online fundraising exploded.

At Cato, we've never experienced that sort of whiplash between Republican and Democratic administrations. Our principles endure no matter who is in the White House.

From the beginning, we have seen ourselves as an independent, nonpartisan, libertarian think tank. Each word in that description matters.

We are independent in that we think for ourselves and are affiliated with no other organization and no special interest. We neither seek nor accept funding from any government. As Ezra Klein, who just left *Vox* to join the *New York Times*, said, "Cato's credibility is derived from its independence."

We are nonpartisan in that we don't line up with either political party. We work with members of both parties on issues where we agree, and we oppose bad policies from either party. Polls of congressional staff have shown that Cato is held in high regard on both sides of the aisle.

We are libertarian: like John Locke and Adam Smith, the American Founders, and Milton Friedman, we believe that free people usually make better decisions for themselves and their families than politicians and bureaucracies can.

And we are a think tank. We take the ideas of great thinkers and apply them to current policy issues. We're not a political party, a lobby, or a grassroots action organization, although the books and studies we produce are used by many such organizations. Through our work, we have been creating a presence for libertarian ideas in Washington and in the national policy debate for more than 40 years.

And now, once again, we face a new administration with a new policy agenda. We have been talking with

the Biden administration and other Democrats about some policy ideas that they might welcome. I expect the administration will also put forth policy proposals that our scholars will be highly critical of.

Shortly after the election, I wrote an article in a Capitol Hill newspaper cautioning the new team not to overreach. I noted that polls showed that voters wanted a change but were not endorsing unaffordable spending programs and a reverse culture war. Biden, I said, "has a mandate for modest normalcy, not revolutionary radicalism. It's not only why he beat President Trump, it's also why he beat Bernie Sanders."

And I offered a few other points a Biden administration should keep in mind. In 2020, 77 percent of Americans called immigration a "good thing" for the country today, up 20 percentage points since 2010. Seventy-five percent of Americans, including 57 percent of Republicans, think undocumented immigrants should be allowed to stay. Ninety percent of Americans think international trade is a good thing, and 70 percent support trade agreements, a substantial increase in recent years.

Fifty-one percent of Republicans and 76 percent of Democrats think marijuana should be legalized, and voters endorsed drug war reforms in seven states and the District of Columbia.

Voters in exit polls expressed support for Black Lives Matter. But in California, where Biden got 63 percent of the vote, a strong majority of voters rejected a return to racial preferences in college admissions.

Californians also rejected expanded rent control and overruled the legislature's demand that Uber and Lyft classify their drivers as employees, which would have wrecked those companies' business model. Illinois voters rejected the governor's tax increase proposal.

Most Americans support expanded diplomacy and trade but less military spending and foreign intervention. An overwhelming majority—74 percent—favor constraining the president's ability to start a war without the approval of Congress.

No matter who is in the White House, our colleagues will continue to publish sound policy analysis that makes the case for our enduring principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets, and peace.

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