

Chapter 3: Promoting “America First” and MAGA: Republican Party Domination of All Three Branches of the Federal Government

◆ Domestic agenda items continue to take precedence due to the national division referred to as the “Two Americas”

Political polarization has been a recent trend in American politics, and the support rates for both the Trump and Biden administrations have continued to show a clear division, with approval from supporters affiliated with the president’s party at around 80% and that from supporters from other parties at about 20%. In the 2024 presidential election, the Republican Trump-Vance team defeated the Democratic Harris-Walz team, winning not only the electoral vote but also the popular vote. However, there is still a significant gap between the policies pursued by the two parties, and the US political division will continue after the inauguration of the second Trump administration.

The stance of the second Trump administration will be to implement policies by appealing to supporters of its own party rather than seeking domestic reconciliation amid the political division. Domestic agendas – immigration policy, tax cuts, education reform, and reform of federal government agencies such as the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) – will be prioritized in order to dismantle the “deep state,” a top Trump priority.

◆ Pursuit of strict border control and economic nationalism

The Republican Party has now transformed into the Trump Party, pursuing policies based on Trump’s “America First” and “MAGA (Make America Great Again)” slogans in place of traditional conservative Republican policies. In the 2024 elections, the Republican Party achieved a trifecta, winning the presidential election and a majority in both the House and Senate. In addition, six of the nine Supreme Court justices are conservatives, giving the party a dominant position in all three branches of the federal government – executive, legislative, and judicial – which makes it easier for President Trump to advance his policy agendas amid the deep divisions in domestic politics.

Against this backdrop, immigration policy will continue to be a symbolic area that represents the division of the United States. In the past, the Republican Party, which was more aligned with the business community, wanted to secure foreign labor, and its stance was in line with the Democratic Party’s openness to immigration. Under the second Trump administration, though, strict border control and tightened control over immigrants will be implemented based on the arguments that looser immigration will undermine public safety in the United States in addition to the rationale that more American citizens could lose their jobs. Some points out that immigration policy under the second Trump administration will be on par with the most restrictive immigration policies in American history, such as the Immigration Act of 1924 that effectively excluded Asian immigrants. The deportation of illegal immigrants, the construction of a wall along the US-Mexican border, and the deployment of the National Guard and US troops to border areas will be pursued. On the other hand, the abolition of birthright citizenship, which Trump advocated during his campaign, will be unlikely to be realized as it would violate the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Therefore, close attention should be paid to the feasibility of the immigration policies Trump advocates. Immigration policy will have significant social and cultural impacts, and it will be a key area for measuring the national character of the United States as a nation of immigrants.

In the 2024 presidential election, the voters’ most prioritized issue was the economy. Reflecting the

inward-looking orientation of the United States in recent years, the second Trump administration will take a stronger stance on economic nationalism, the most prominent feature of which will be seen in its trade policy. While the Republican Party has long promoted free trade, the second Trump administration will undertake a protectionist trade policy that will impose high tariffs, such as a universal baseline tariff of 10-20% and a tariff of 60% or higher on imports from China.



(Photo: AP/Aflo)

The trade order and multilateral/minilateral trade frameworks that follow international rules will see little progress, and bilateral arrangements that use tariffs and economic sanctions as negotiation leverage will become the norm. The president will continue to oppose the proposed acquisition of US Steel by Nippon Steel, and uncertainty about the US investment environment will also be an issue.

In his acceptance speech for the GOP presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention in July 2024, Trump said he would end the EV mandate on day one, reversing the pro-EV policies implemented under the Biden administration, although he is expected to provide some protection for domestic companies like Tesla. Fossil fuel production is expected to increase under President Trump in line with his campaign catchphrase of “drill, baby, drill.” Climate change policies will also be reviewed, all of which make a fundamental shift in the US energy policy inevitable.

As President Trump began his first term, a lack of preparation for the transition of power left many important positions vacant. Immediately after winning the 2024 presidential race, however, Trump announced a series of appointments for the new administration ahead of his second term. However, there have been a procession of nominations of people with no experience in key government positions, including Elon Musk, a businessman who was one of the major donors to Trump’s presidential campaign, to head the newly created Department of Government Efficiency charged with reviewing federal spending. These nominations raise concerns about the suitability of the nominees, and the Republican majority in the Senate is narrow even with the trifecta. Close attention should thus be paid as to whether the president’s nominees will be smoothly confirmed by the Senate. In general, it is expected that the administration will be run by people loyal to President Trump, as evidenced by the appointment of Susan Wiles, co-chair of Trump’s 2024 presidential campaign, as his White House chief of staff with a key role in the administration, and that the administration will be run in a way that strongly reflects President Trump’s intentions.

◆ Recommendations

- The policies of the second Trump administration will be even more “America First” and deal-oriented than those of the first. Some pessimistic observers believe this could lead the United States to neglect its alliances, but it is unlikely that the US would abandon its alliances or withdraw from NATO. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept was also promoted under the first Trump administration,

and it is difficult to expect a policy shift in the emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region given the US-China strategic competition. In response to the second Trump administration’s pursuit of an “America First” policy, broad appeals should be made at multiple levels – not only to President Trump and his inner circle but also to the US Congress, state governments, think tanks, and academia – on the importance of the US-Japan alliance, which enjoys bipartisan support. It is also necessary to stress where Japan’s national interests overlap with those of the United States.

- It is vital to maintain and strengthen multilateral/minilateral cooperation frameworks in which both Japan and the United States participate, such as the G7, the Quad (Japan, the United States, Australia, and India), Japan-US-ROK cooperation, and Japan-US-Australia-Philippines cooperation, and to ensure that the United States remains engaged in the international community. If the “America First” policy is taken too far, Japan should pursue deeper cooperation with like-minded countries, whether the United States participates or not, and prepare in advance to strengthen the rules and mechanisms for protecting Japan’s national interests.

(December 5, 2024, Naoko Funatsu,
Research Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs)