

# Welcome to Trump's world

**His sweeping victory will shake up everything**

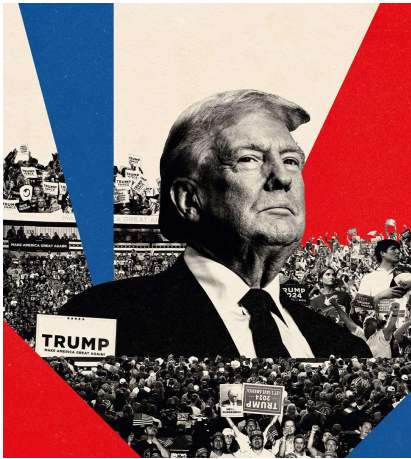


image: Cristiana Couceiro/Getty Images

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ASTUNNING VICTORY has [crowned Donald Trump](#) the most consequential American president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. After defeating Kamala Harris—and not just narrowly, but by a wide margin—America's 45th president will become its 47th. The fact that Mr Trump will be the first to win non-consecutive terms since Grover Cleveland in 1892 does not start to do justice to his achievement. He has defined a new political era, for America and the world.

In some ways the Trump era is very modern. It was made possible by technological changes and media fragmentation, at a time when distinguishing law from politics and politics from showbiz is hard. But it is also a return to an old idea of America. Before the fight against fascism convinced FDR that it was in his country's interest to help bring order and prosperity to the world, the country was hostile towards immigration, scornful of trade and sceptical of foreign entanglements. In the 1920s and 1930s that led to dark times. It could do so again.

After Tuesday's victory, the world now lies at Mr Trump's feet. He has won a mandate and, most probably, the control over Washington he needs to exercise it. In what was supposed to be a knife-edge election, Mr Trump not only carried most of the battleground states. Thanks to big swings in states that were never in doubt, including Florida, New Jersey and New York, he also won the popular vote. As the polls predicted, he enjoyed a big surge in support from [Latino men](#). But women, whom Ms Harris had expected to throng to the polls for her, also swung towards Mr Trump. His victory will be made complete by Republicans retaking the [majority in the Senate](#) and, as seems likely, holding on to the House.

There will be time for recriminations among Democrats about what went wrong, but the early answer is: almost everything. Poll after poll said that the country under President Joe Biden was going in the wrong direction. Voters never forgave him for the burst of inflation that began in the summer of 2021. The Biden administration promoted a view of culture that is out of step with most Americans, especially on gender, which featured in a huge share of Trump campaign adverts. Most damaging of all, voters throughout the country were infuriated by the Democrats' failure to stop people crossing the southern border illegally. And the party compounded its errors by covering up Mr Biden's disqualifying frailty until it was undeniable. But by then they had no time to find a political talent capable of beating Mr Trump.

Something deeper is afoot, too. In 2016 some of America's allies comforted themselves with the thought that Mr Trump's presidency was an aberration. By choosing to overlook his attempts to stop the transfer of power to Mr Biden in 2020, voters have shown just how wrong that conclusion was. Instead they have endorsed Mr

Trump's relentless use of partisanship as the basis of his politics, including the slander of his opponents as corrupt and treacherous—spreading a cynicism and despair about the merits of democracy that may serve him, but will not serve America. MAGA is a movement of iconoclasm against the kind of benign internationalists who had occupied the White House for 70 years. This week a majority of Americans embraced it knowingly.

If Mr Trump has wrecked the old order, what will take its place? Whereas the old America championed free trade, Mr Trump will accelerate the return to pre-war mercantilism. He is a staunch believer in tariffs. Trade deficits, he claims, are proof that foreigners are taking his country for fools and losers. On his watch [America is likely to be spendthrift](#), as he and his party push through tax cuts, which will further widen the budget deficit. Mr Trump has promised massive deregulation. That may well bring benefits, but the next president craves sycophancy. There is a risk he will carve out special deals for his supporters, such as Elon Musk, the world's richest man.

Our hope is that Mr Trump will manage to avoid these pitfalls, and we acknowledge that in his first term he mostly did. Our fear is that during this presidency he will be at his most radical and unrestrained, especially if, as America's oldest-ever president, his mental powers begin to fail him. Having learned from Trump 1, his team will set out to ensure that no one who is likely to restrain him will be appointed to the administration. Mr Trump will therefore be able to put his control of Congress and his popular mandate to maximum use.

In the decades after FDR American foreign policy worked through long-standing alliances. By contrast, Mr Trump's instincts are to treat every encounter like a deal where money is to be made. He likes to say he is so unpredictable that America's adversaries will be too cowed to try anything. He may indeed be able to strike a deal with Vladimir Putin over Ukraine that does not end up with Russian tanks in Kyiv. He may also be able to exert pressure on Iran and deter China from using military power to dominate Asia. But if might is right, doubts about Mr Trump's reliability are just as likely to incite Chinese and Russian aggression.

What is certain is that his unpredictability will impose costs on America's allies, especially in Europe. If they fear they cannot depend on Mr Trump to support them if they are threatened, they will take steps to protect themselves. At the very least America's allies will need to spend more on their own defence. If they cannot muster enough conventional weapons to deter the local aggressor, more of them, besides Britain and France, may get nuclear weapons.

Part of America's global leadership was through the power of example. In its own politics and in its international conduct it was mindful of the precedents it was setting. What was remarkable was not that American presidents sometimes broke the rules, but how much they stuck by them. Under Mr Trump the converse will be true. His victory will have a demonstration effect elsewhere. In Brazil Jair Bolsonaro was elected two years after Mr Trump won in 2016. In France Marine Le Pen now seems a more likely president in 2027. The international movement of nationalist populists that seemed to be waning after 2020 will be revived, and Mr Trump will inspire new imitators. If he uses the justice system against his opponents, as he has vowed, it will set a dangerous example.

### **The old order in the new world**

Mr Trump's victory has changed America, and the world will need to grasp what that means. America remains the pre-eminent power. Despite the debasement of its politics, its [economy remains world-beating](#)—at least for now. It dominates artificial intelligence. It is rich and its armed forces are second-to-none, even if the [People's Liberation Army](#) is catching up.

However, without American enlightened self-interest as an organising principle, it will be open season for bullies. Countries will be more able to browbeat their neighbours, economically and militarily, without fear of consequences. Their victims, unable to turn to America for relief, will be more likely to compromise or capitulate. Global initiatives, from tackling climate change to arms control, have just got harder.

Mr Trump would no doubt retort that this is the world's problem, not America's. Under him, Americans can get on with their lives free from the weight of foreign responsibilities. However, two world wars and the ruinous

collapse of trade in the 1930s say that America does not have that luxury. For a time—possibly for years—America may do fine. Eventually, the world will catch up with it. ■