

# Biden Has Stayed in the Center



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In the weeks since the inauguration, conventional wisdom has it that President Biden “is governing as an activist liberal.” Noting that he won the White House as an avowed moderate, some have concluded that because the President is pushing for big, rapid responses to the cascading series of crises he inherited, he somehow has changed his stripes or is being controlled by far-left elements in his Party.

This is simply wrong. Joe Biden has never been a 1990s-style small-government centrist. Rather, he is governing precisely as he ran: as an activist, 21<sup>st</sup> century moderate. This is revealed by his signals to Congress – the President is seeking bipartisan consensus on going big in response to COVID, using one of his first White House meeting with Members to bring a group of Senate Republicans to the Oval Office. And it is reflected in his personnel choices, cabinet picks who showcase America’s broad demographic diversity but also hew closely to Biden’s moderate governing style.

Mostly, however, it is the President’s executive orders that have drawn comment. Yes, he has moved fast and aggressively, because that is what he promised to do to stem the tides of pandemic,

recession, and other Trump-era disasters.

*“I’m not making new law, I’m eliminating bad policy.” –[Biden](#) on his executive orders*

And most of these executive actions should look familiar; they are a return to the Obama-era governance known for its centrism. (Even [Fox News](#) thinks so.) Here’s how they compare:

## **January 20, 2021**

### **Preserve/fortify DACA, which helps "Dreamers"**

Biden is restoring trust in a program that nearly everyone across the political spectrum agrees with. Strengthening the Obama-era policy is a repudiation of the extreme policies of the previous administration. As the [LA Times](#) describes, “Taken together, Biden’s plans represent a U-turn after four years of relentless strikes against immigration”.

### **Rejoin Paris Climate Agreement**

The U.S. first joined the newly created Paris Climate Agreement during President Obama’s second term. According to [the NRDC](#), in December 2015, President Obama announced that the United States, along with nearly 200 other countries, had committed to the [Paris Climate Agreement](#), an ambitious global action plan to fight climate change.

### **Extend protection from deportation for Liberians in U.S.**

There’s bipartisan and long-standing [precedent](#) for the protection of Liberians. President Bush deferred the enforced departure of Liberians originally granted TPS. President Obama extended that grant of Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) to March 31, 2018.

### **Require ethics pledge for executive branch personnel**

President Obama made this standard practice in [2009](#). The [Obama White House](#) ethics pledge read: "Section 1. Ethics Pledge. Every appointee in every executive agency appointed on or after January 20, 2009, shall sign, and upon signing shall be contractually committed to, the following pledge upon becoming an appointee:"

### **Modernize and improve regulatory review**

This is standard practice for any president, including [President Bush](#), who instructed agencies to improve existing regulations and eliminate unnecessary ones. According to [Brookings](#), “the Obama administration’s January 2011 executive order directed cabinet agencies to develop and submit plans for reviewing, modifying, streamlining, and repealing unnecessarily burdensome regulations

(independent regulatory agencies were encouraged to voluntarily submit such plans in a separate July 2011 executive order).”

## **Combat discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity**

According to [NPR](#), this order is based on an established ruling by the Supreme Court. The case, *Bostock v. Clayton*, found that employment discrimination against LGBTQ people is sex discrimination; Biden’s order applies this to analogous laws in health care, housing, and education, as well.

## **Create position of COVID-19 response coordinator**

[In 2014](#), Obama made a parallel move and appointed Ron Klain to serve as his administration’s Ebola response coordinator. The Obama Administration also created a pandemic response unit.

## **January 22, 2021**

### **Restore collective bargaining power for federal workers**

This is a return to an Obama-era policy. [In 2008](#), President Obama [said](#): "I support collective bargaining rights for all workers. As President, I will review decisions by the Bush Administration that have denied these rights to federal employees and seek to restore them."

### **Implement a 100-day moratorium on deportations**

Biden is providing the country with a complete reset from four years of disastrous Trump-era immigration policy. As noted in a [Third Way report](#) on this order, past administrations have made similar moves to relax immigration laws in times of crisis, including Bush pausing employer-verification after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, and Obama granting broad protections to Dreamers.

## **January 25, 2021**

### **Tighten ‘Buy American’ rules in government procurement**

This is a return to a rule in the Obama-era 2009 stimulus. According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), the package had a “Buy American” provision [requiring the use of U.S.-made iron and steel and manufactured goods](#) in public works projects.”

### **Limit the transfer of military equipment to local police departments**

This executive order is a return to an Obama-era policy. [In 2015](#), President Obama ordered the federal government Monday to stop distributing a limited inventory of military equipment to local law enforcement agencies across the country because, he said, it makes police seem like an "occupying force" instead of public servants.

## **Repeal ban on transgender people serving openly in U.S. military**

This is a return to an Obama-era policy put in place in 2016. The Obama administration has officially ended the US military's ban on openly serving transgender troops, ABC News reported. Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced the change on Thursday, saying only soldiers' qualifications for service should be relevant to the military, not their gender identity.

## **January 26, 2021**

### **End the Justice Department's use of private prisons**

This is reflective of Obama-era policies. In 2016, the Obama administration said it planned a gradual phase-out of private prisons by letting contracts expire or by scaling them back to a level consistent with recent declines in the U.S. prison population.

### **Directs HUD to address discriminatory housing practices**

In 2015, the Obama administration announced a rule aimed at strengthening fair housing practices and helping end racial segregation in neighborhoods.

### **Directs agencies to engage in consultations with tribal governments**

This is a return to a 2009 policy under President Obama. On November 5, 2009, he issued a Presidential Memorandum directing each agency to submit a detailed plan of action describing how the agency will implement the policies and directives of Executive Order 13175. Since that time, the Department has established a joint federal-tribal team to develop a Department-wide policy on Tribal consultation with certain goals.

### **Combat racism against Asian-Americans, Pacific Islanders**

In October 2009, President Obama reestablished the White House Initiative on AAPIs (Initiative) through Executive Order 13515. The Initiative, housed in the Department of Education, works to improve the quality of life and opportunities for AAPIs by facilitating increased access to and participation in federal programs, where AAPIs remain underserved.

## **January 27, 2021**

### **Elevate climate change as a national security concern**

Obama in 2016: "Climate change poses a significant and growing threat to national security, both at home and abroad. Climate change and its associated impacts affect economic prosperity, public health and safety, and international stability. Extended drought, more frequent and severe weather events, heat waves, warming and acidifying ocean waters, catastrophic wildfires, and rising sea levels all have compounding effects on people's health and well-being."

### **Establish the President's Council on Science and Technology**

This is standard practice for administrations of both parties. The President's Council on Science and Technology was established in its current form by President George H. W. Bush. According to AIP in 2017, "After President George H. W. Bush established PCAST, every president to follow has reconstituted the council by executive order and appointed a new slate of members, with the president's science advisor serving as co-chair." Trump was an outlier in abolishing PCAST.

## **January 28, 2021**

### **Strengthen the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid**

In 2020, the Trump administration declined to open the ACA's online marketplaces to new customers, and took multiple steps to weaken the policy. Biden is restrengthen this Obama-era program to ensure that all Americans have access to health insurance.

### **Expand access to reproductive health care**

This order rescinds a Trump-era policy and is a return to a 2009 Obama administration policy. The Obama White House released a statement saying: "It is clear that the provisions of the Mexico City Policy are unnecessarily broad and unwarranted under current law, and for the past eight years, they have undermined efforts to promote safe and effective voluntary family planning in developing countries. For these reasons, it is right for us to rescind this policy and restore critical efforts to protect and empower women and promote global economic development."