

Joseph R. Biden, Jr. is the President-elect. Amy Coney Barrett was sworn in as the newest associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The pandemic continues to rage across the United States and daily recorded cases exceed 120,000—but the American economy appears to be rebounding, for now. Congress returns for the post-election “lame duck” session. Tensions with China continue to rise as the United States sells additional arms to Taiwan.

Election Results

This [election cycle](#), over 160 million people, approximately 67% of eligible voters, participated. This is the highest turnout in 120 years. Former vice president Joe Biden received over 75.5 million votes to President Trump’s 71.2 million. As of this writing, Biden secured 279 electoral votes to President Trump’s 214, making him President-elect of the United States. Several states have still not finalized their counts, but by surpassing the 270 threshold Biden will be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States on January 20. Kamala Harris will become the first woman and person of color to serve as Vice President and Trump will be the first defeated incumbent in nearly three decades.

Nevertheless, Trump has not conceded, vowed legal action, and made a number of [unsubstantiated claims](#) about voter fraud. There is a [weeks-long timeline during which the 538-member Electoral College determines the president](#). December 8 is the deadline for resolving election disputes and all state recounts and court contests must be completed by this date. On December 14, the electors will vote by paper ballot, which must be delivered to the designated officials by December 23. On January 6, the House and Senate will hold a joint session to count the electoral votes.

Down ticket, the United States Senate looks likely to [remain under Republican control](#). The current balance is 48 Democrats to 49 Republicans—the Alaska Senate race has yet to be called and the two Georgia Senate races will go to a run-off in early January, with all three seats currently held by Republicans. [Democrats retained control of the House of Representatives](#), but Republicans cut into the Democratic majority. Republicans over performed in House and Senate races and the “blue wave” many pundits and pollsters predicted never materialized.

Amy Coney Barrett Sworn in as Supreme Court Justice

On October 26, one week before Election Day, Amy Coney Barrett was [confirmed by the United States Senate](#) as the newest associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. She was sworn in the following day, replacing Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died five weeks prior, thereby solidifying a conservative majority on the court. The move to confirm Barrett was unprecedented, the Senate had never before considered a Supreme Court nominee this close to an election. This infuriated Democrats and led to an explosion in political fundraising. Barrett is the third justice Trump has appointed to the Supreme Court and is his [220th federal judge](#) to be confirmed by the Senate, capping a dramatic reshaping of the federal judiciary that will reverberate long after Trump leaves office.

Pandemic Update

The United States has over 10 million cases of COVID-19 and is averaging more than 100,000 new cases each day—this is more than a 50% increase compared to late October and approximately 1,000

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people per day are dying from the virus. The spread of the virus is [not confined to one state or region](#)—sixteen states reported record high hospitalizations on Friday, November 6 and 22 states have reported at least one record high day of hospitalizations in November. The pressures on the health systems are significant, [over 60,000 people](#) are currently hospitalized and nearly 11,000 are in intensive care. States are re-imposing mitigation measures, issuing mask mandates and some hospitals are rejecting out-of-state patients due to the existing strain on their capacity.

On Monday, November 9, President-elect Biden announced his [coronavirus advisory board](#), co-chaired by former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, former Food and Drug Administration commissioner David Kessler and Yale University's Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith. The group includes thirteen other public health experts. The Biden transition team has also shared their [COVID-19 plan](#) and said that they will move pandemic response in a dramatically different direction than the Trump administration. We can expect a nation-wide mask mandate. Biden has said that he will direct scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to set evidence based guidance to help limit outbreaks, so that leaders in every state and community are operating under the same standards. There will be significant investment in vaccine distribution and Biden has called for a major ramp-up in testing.

Despite the persistent public health crisis, the American economy rebounded significantly in the third quarter with the [first estimate showing 33.1% growth](#) (annualized), the best quarterly performance ever recorded. However, this was dependent on being a bounce off the worst-ever quarter, as second-quarter GDP had dropped by 31.4% (annualized). This still left U.S. economic output below pre-pandemic levels as dark clouds reappear for the economy with another surge in coronavirus cases.

Lame Duck Congress

The United States Senate returned to Washington on November 9, with the House scheduled to return the following week, for the lame duck session of the 116th Congress. Both Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have stated that a coronavirus aid package will be at the top of the agenda, but there are differences in the size and scope of each party's proposals and there are questions over whether a compromise can be reached in the coming weeks. Another critical item is government funding, Congress will need to strike an agreement on the matter before the current funding runs out on December 11. Lawmakers also want to pass the defense policy bill, the National Defense Authorization Act, by the end of the year. This bill has been passed 59 years in a row, and bicameral negotiations are ongoing. Among the most contentious issues is the renaming of military bases that honor Confederate figures—Trump has repeatedly threatened to veto any measure that would change the names of military bases. Senate floor action will also focus on confirming the remainder of Trump's nominees for circuit and district courts. Senate Republicans currently enjoy a three-seat majority, but that will change when Democrat Senator-elect Mark Kelly of Arizona is sworn in later this month for the balance of late Senator John McCain's term.

Tensions with China Continue to Grow—Will Biden Change Course?

Tensions between the United States and China have been running high and the state of relations is unlikely to change dramatically with the incoming Biden administration. Recent moves related to Taiwan also draw Washington and Beijing into greater risk of conflict—the U.S. is speeding arms sales to Taiwan amidst concern that Chinese intimidation is growing and the cross-Strait balance is tilting. This year the U.S. approved six arms packages for Taiwan, including [three in the past month](#). In response, China has increased military flights in Taiwanese airspace as a show of force and Chinese authorities have threatened to retaliate saying the sales [“seriously interfere with China’s internal affairs.”](#) China considers the island part of it’s a territory, though it has ruled itself for decade. The United States has kept unofficial ties with the autonomous island and is Taiwan’s main source for weapons.

Relations between the United States and China have deteriorated in recent months, with disputes emerging over issues ranging from the coronavirus pandemic, to trade, and technology competition. The hardline posture of the Trump administration has bipartisan support and may see limited change under the Biden administration because both Democrats and Republicans are in agreement that China is the main strategic rival for the United States. Biden adopted a critical tone during the campaign on China and, while sharing the Trump administration’s criticism, he will differ in tactics to address the challenge from his predecessor. He will coordinate more with allies and seek to strengthen existing alliances in order to gain more leverage to address the challenge. Biden recognizes the complexity of the matter and sees that areas of competition encompass technology, military, economic, diplomatic and ideological aspects.

Personnel Moves

Department of Defense – Defense Secretary **Mark Esper** was fired. **Christopher Miller**, formerly the director of the National Counterterrorism Center, will serve as acting. **Matthew Flynn** is deputy assistant secretary for counter narcotics and global threats.

Department of Energy – **Lisa Gordon-Hagerty**, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, resigned. **Jonathan Wetzel** is chief of staff in the office of cybersecurity, energy security and emergency response.

Department of Homeland Security - **Sean Plankey** is the nominee for assistant director for infrastructure security.

Department of Justice - **Richard Pilger**, head of the Election Crimes Branch, resigned his position in protest.

State Department – **Nina Pedrosa** is acting undersecretary for public diplomacy and public affairs.

Treasury Department - **Patricia Pollard** is the deputy assistant secretary for international monetary policy.

United States Trade Representative - **Michael Nemelka** has been confirmed by the Senate as deputy USTR.

White House - Three Deputy Assistants to the President have been promoted to Assistant to the President: **Tim Pataki**, director of the Office of Public Liaison; **Brian Jack**, director of the Office of Political Affairs; and **Douglas Hoelscher**, director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.