

# A Hard Day's Right: A Brit's experience of Trump's base

Blog by Joe Armitage, Lead Analyst, UK Politics, 1 March 2024

---

CPAC - the Conservative Political Action Conference - is a bewildering experience for a British immigrant to the US whose understanding of what constitutes 'right-wing' is completely unreflective of the Republican party's most vocal and influential contingent. I expected sophisticated panel discussions espousing the virtues of supply-side economics and speeches articulating why an assertive and muscular America is essential to maintain its place at the top of the global world order.

Instead - with a theme of 'Where Globalism Goes to Die' - it was clear from all of the speakers, which included former President Trump, former UK prime minister Liz Truss, former Brexit party leader Nigel Farage and the President of Argentina Javier Milei, that the Republican party's base is intent on ensuring that the United States retreats from its role globally and instead focuses on a series of domestic challenges to avert the country's perceived "destruction."

These domestic challenges - which dominated the conference and were interweaved with references from the Book of Genesis - were exclusively oriented around securing the southern border, more robustly punishing crime by ending the selective prosecutorial discretion exhibited by Democrat state attorney generals, clamping down on the healthcare industry's involvement in the gender transition of children and reversing President Biden's "secret plan" to cost every American \$80,000 dollars through environmental regulations.

Such policy topics undoubtedly enthused the conference's attendees, all of whom were palpably buzzing with the sense that they have a realistic shot of retaking the presidency and the senate this November. Ultimately, with Trump now consistency polling ahead of President Biden in all the key electoral college swing states - something that was not the case prior to the 2020 election - their optimism and excitement is justified.

Despite this enthusiasm, there was no sense of complacency. Several events recognised that Republicans failed to use their sizable activist base at the 2020 election. To address this, Republican election officials and the party's candidate for one of Pennsylvania's



senate seats, Ambassador Carla Sands, said that dozens of conservative attorneys are being recruited to prevent supposedly widescale ballot harvesting by Democrats. It was also recognised that the Republicans need to significantly scale up their operations to maximise the extent to which Republican voters mail in their ballots early if they're to have a chance of winning critical swing states.

Beyond discussions about enhancing the Republican party's election ground war and a narrow set of socially conservative domestic policy focuses, there was little else on show at the conference. This was an inevitability given that the attendance of any media organisation or Republican politician deemed too "left-wing" or insufficiently in favour of President Trump was banned. This meant, for example, that the exhibition hall - which have featured stands from mainstream businesses seeking to influence political attendees at previous CPACs - was exclusively reserved for businesses selling MAGA and Trump merchandise.

It also meant that the conference involved a significant amount of auditioning for positions in a potential second Trump Administration. This included individuals like former FBI assistant director James Finch, who said he'd accept the appointment of FBI director and whose business was a sponsor of CPAC. Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign's press secretary, told a panel that all the potential appointees in a second Trump Administration were currently being screened by the Heritage Foundation. CPAC attendees had an opportunity to screen and vote on Trump's most important appointment, specifically his running mate for the position of United States Vice President. Former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy - now Trump's loyal warmup act - and South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem jointly topped the straw poll.

With the views of attendees so resolutely aligned with Trump and those in his orbit, perhaps the most instructive factor at the conference from a policy perspective were the words used by the former president in his nearly two-hour speech. He stated - largely through a tapestry of randomly interspersed anecdotes - that he was the only thing capable of preventing WWIII, a 'wave of migrant crime' due to an open southern border, the end of democracy, and 'ruthless gangs' taking over suburban neighbourhoods.

Throughout, he communicated that the policy prescription to achieve these objectives was himself, using executive powers, to act as an uncompromising strongman. The leaders of foreign powers perceived to be acting against the interests of the United States - such as Mexico failing to prevent migrants from travelling to the southern border and China aiding Iran by purchasing its oil - would be threatened with crippling tariffs. On the domestic front, he stated that he intended to ensure that police officers were given blanket

**Global Counsel**

✉ [info@global-counsel.com](mailto:info@global-counsel.com)

🌐 [www.global-counsel.com](http://www.global-counsel.com)



immunity from prosecution so that they can tackle crime more robustly. He also indicated that those responsible for the January 6 attack on the Capitol would be pardoned by describing them as 'hostages'.

In sum, CPAC powerfully encapsulated the Republican party's overwhelming unity behind Trump, a sentiment firmly underscored by Trump's commanding victory over Nikki Haley in the South Carolina primary in her own state. The conference was a vivid rally around the pillars of national sovereignty, a staunch rejection of globalism, and an uncompromising agenda of domestic policies poised to redefine not only America's path but also its impact on the world. Witnessing this convergence of ideas was both unsettling and humbling. It served as a poignant reminder that many beliefs branded as 'extreme' have surged into the mainstream, especially given that Trump's unabashed embrace of them is finding an audience in voters who may yet again turn out for him in November.