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By Lisa Lerer

Nov. 6, 2024 Updated 1:02 p.m. ET

*Donald Trump has won the 2024 presidential election. Follow live updates and results.*

Donald Trump told Americans exactly what he planned to do.

He would use military force against his political opponents. He would fire thousands of career public servants. He would deport millions of immigrants in military-style roundups. He would crush the independence of the Department of Justice, use government to push public health conspiracies and abandon America's allies abroad. He would turn the government into a tool of his own grievances, a way to punish his critics and richly reward his supporters. He would be a “dictator” — if only on Day 1.

And, when asked to give him the power to do all of that, the voters said yes.

This was a conquering of the nation not by force but with a permission slip. Now, America stands on the precipice of an authoritarian style of governance never before seen in its 248-year history.

After defeating Vice President Kamala Harris, who would have become the first female U.S. president, Mr. Trump will bring his own historic firsts into the White House: the only president convicted of dozens of crimes, accused of dozens more and twice impeached.

Unlike in 2016, when he scored a surprise electoral victory but lost the popular vote, Mr. Trump will go to Washington able to claim a broad mandate. Over his four years out of power, he rebuilt the Republican Party in his image, creating a movement that only seemed to strengthen with every recrimination. He will begin his second term bound by few political norms, after a campaign in which he seemed to defy every one.

He did well in the battleground states, winning at least five of the seven, and appeared on track to win the popular vote — the first time a Republican candidate has done that since George W. Bush in 2004. His party flipped the Senate, and was in range of maintaining control of the House of Representatives. Blue areas shifted toward him, with Mr. Trump improving his performance in places like New York City by double digits. So did suburbs, rural areas, even college towns.

“America has given us an unprecedented and powerful mandate,” Mr. Trump told cheering supporters at the convention center in West Palm Beach, Fla., for a victory party before the result was official. “I will govern by a simple motto: promises made, promises kept.”



Voting at the University of Michigan's coliseum in Ann Arbor. Andrea Bruce for The New York Times

That mandate came not just from the American people, he said.

“Many people have told me that God spared my life for a reason,” he said. “That reason was to save our country.”

His victory was a direct repudiation of some top aides, military brass and Republican officials who served in his first administration. They had publicly warned that he would not save the nation but destroy it.

Yet the electoral climate was ripe for Mr. Trump — though he had a hand in creating the weather.

In the wake of the pandemic, which critics said his administration badly mismanaged, the country grew more skeptical of government. Trust in the media, science, medicine, the judicial system and other mainstay institutions of American

life plunged as more voters embraced the doubts Mr. Trump had sown for years.

Public opinion shifted in his direction on issues that had long been the centerpiece of his political movement. Even Democrats embraced stricter policies on immigration and crime in the 2024 race, underscoring how much his relentless focus on the border had resonated.

After his defeat, Mr. Trump spent four years tightening his grip on the Republican Party, to the point where both lawmakers and voters professed to believe his lies that the 2020 election was stolen from him. The number of Americans identifying as Republican edged ahead of Democrats for the first time in decades.

Even the value of democracy itself was in question. In a poll conducted by The New York Times/Siena College last week, nearly half of all voters said they were skeptical that the American experiment in self-governance was working, with 45 percent saying that the nation's democracy does not do a good job representing ordinary people.

Democrats left those concerns unanswered. Instead, Ms. Harris's condensed campaign largely endorsed the status quo of the Biden administration, offering a rallying cry around protecting democracy without specifics on how to fix what so many said is a broken system — none more so than Mr. Trump.

Poll after poll showed that the economy remained the biggest issue, followed by immigration and frustration over the rising prices of groceries and housing. Mr. Trump ran hard on pledges to lower costs and seal the southern border, while offering ideas to eliminate entire categories of taxation, playing on economic anxieties to broaden his coalition.

But those economic promises were interwoven with a steadfast refusal to moderate his message. Unleashing a fire hose of insults and conspiracies, Mr. Trump gambled that a nation unmoored by a deadly pandemic and soaring inflation, and deeply dissatisfied with the incumbent who had defeated him, would be ready to re-embrace him as a blunt-speaking, menacing strongman who would fix it.



Mr. Trump rebuilt the Republican Party in his image during his four years out of office. Doug Mills/The New York Times

Rather than abandon his false claims of a stolen 2020 election, he leaned further into them. In Mr. Trump's revisionist history, those convicted of attacking the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, became "political prisoners." The siege, which killed at least seven people and injured 150 more, was recast as a "day of love."

Instead of softening the crude rhetoric that has long been one of his hallmarks, he became more obscene, even appearing to pantomime a sex act at a rally in the campaign's final week. He wooed Black and Latino voters with false claims that migrants were stealing their jobs and were responsible for a wave of violent crime.

Mr. Trump uttered the kind of insults about Ms. Harris and other prominent female politicians that were once unthinkable to say in public. Even his appeals to women, a group he was struggling to win, were laced with a sense of menace: In the final



weeks of the race, he promised to protect women — “whether the women like it or not.”

He proudly flouted the backlash to one of his signature accomplishments — overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing a constitutional right to an abortion — and appeared to pay little price at the polls.

And he ended the race by insulting the Puerto Rican voters his campaign had spent months trying to woo.

Throughout the race, Mr. Trump’s most faithful supporters showed little discomfort with this abrasive style. As for his policies, they embraced some and chose to disregard others. When asked about his most divisive plans — like wide-scale deportations and a radical reassessment of American commitment to NATO — many of his voters shrugged, saying they doubted that such extreme measures would ever come to fruition despite his repeated promises.



Supporters of Mr. Trump prayed before many rallies during his campaign. Anna Watts for The New York Times  
For these supporters, Mr. Trump's win represents both the dawn of a new future and a rightful restoration. Yet whether Americans — even some of those who voted for him — will like the reality of Mr. Trump's plans remains to be seen.

Throughout the campaign, economists said his policies would raise inflation, increase costs for families by thousands of dollars annually and spark global trade wars. His promises to empower public health officials who oppose vaccines could spark national outbreaks of disease not seen in decades. And his plans to deport millions of undocumented immigrants could cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars.

It's also unclear how Democrats will respond to these policies and their sudden ejection into the political wilderness. In 2016, they quickly organized into a self-proclaimed resistance movement that helped elect Democrats to Congress and send President Biden to the White House. Now, that movement has run its course, plunging the party into what is likely to be a new round of recriminations and soul-searching about its future.

What is clear, in the end, is that Americans wanted change. And now, they will surely get it.

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