

# [***Two major Trump policy shifts explained in one interview***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJ1-YWP1-DY7V-G01Y-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former President Donald Trump's ***politics*** are mostly focused on himself, as opposed to an ideology, but two notable evolutions this week - on Social Security and TikTok - spotlight something new.

Both Trump and President Joe Biden will look to sell their policy positions now that their general election rematch is upon us. Biden, for instance, has [*shifted on border policy*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/29/politics/border-shutdown-biden-what-matters/index.html), a calculated shift to address the border crisis and also triangulate support away from Trump. But Trump's comments on TikTok and Social Security, both in an unfettered [*interview on CNBC*](https://www.cnbc.com/2024/03/11/cnbc-transcript-former-president-of-the-united-states-donald-trump-speaks-with-cnbcs-squawk-box-today-.html), suggest not calculation, but confusion about Social Security and ambivalence about TikTok.

On Social Security, Trump referred to cuts

Trump spent the primary and much of his political career promising to protect benefits at all costs, a switch for Republicans who have long been warning about deficit spending. Social Security was a top issue during the Republican presidential primary, when Trump [*attacked his GOP opponents*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/11/politics/trump-entitlements-social-security-medicare/index.html), accusing them of wanting to take social security benefits away from older Americans.

It's not now clear what exactly Trump's position is. In an ad-libbed and meandering answer during a telephone interview broadcast on CNBC, Trump seemed to suggest that he was open to cutting Social Security. Here's the relevant portion of Trump's exchange with CNBC's Joe Kernen:

KERNEN: It's almost a third rail of ***politics***. And we've got to what a $33, $34 trillion total debt built up and very little we can do in terms of cutting spending. Discretionary is not going to help. Have you changed your, your outlook on how to handle entitlements Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Mr. President? Seems like something has to be done, or else we're going to be stuck at 120% of debt to GDP forever.

TRUMP: So first of all, there is a lot you can do in terms of entitlements in terms of cutting and in terms of also the theft and the bad management of entitlements, tremendous bad management of entitlements. There's tremendous amounts of things and numbers of things you can do. So I don't necessarily agree with the statement. I know that they're going to end up weakening social security because the country is weak.

Trump's long answer bounced from there to touch on the stock market, the need to drill for more oil in the US, inflation, and how he feels he doesn't get enough credit for the economy or efforts to eradicate the terror group ISIS during his presidency.

The gist, which [*President Joe Biden's campaign*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/11/politics/trump-entitlements-social-security-medicare/index.html#:~:text=But%20Trump%20has%20vowed%20repeatedly,from%20Medicare%20or%20Social%20Security.%E2%80%9D) was very quick to jump on, is that Trump is not always dismissive of cutting entitlements.

Trump's campaign spokesperson, Karoline Leavitt, meanwhile, argued Trump was "clearly talking about cutting waste, not entitlements."

It's not the first time Trump has struggled to both stick to his populist pledge to protect Social Security and also acknowledge the spiraling national debt, as [*CNN's Abby Phillip*](https://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2024/03/12/social-security-medicare-trump-entitlement-programs-nn-vpx.cnn) pointed out.

Watch:

Trump's Social Security comments may have just been an inarticulate answer, although social safety net spending should presumably be something a presidential candidate is prepared to talk about, especially if he made it a top issue of his primary campaign. His answer also did nothing to address Kernen's larger question, about Social Security and Medicare's insolvency crisis. The US government is on an [*unsustainable path,*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/02/politics/national-debt-what-matters/index.html) according to both the Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department. The only presidential candidate who was seriously talking about reforming safety net spending this year, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, was beaten by Trump in part for talking about it.

On TikTok, Trump's flip is more obvious and more complete

As president, he [*issued executive orders*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/08/tech/tiktok-ban-congress-house-biden-trump/index.html) that would have forced ByteDance, TikTok's China-linked parent company to divest the popular social media app, part of a larger anti-China effort during his time in the White House. The effort was stopped by federal courts as his term ended, although ByteDance did move to enact something it calls [*Project Texas*](https://usds.tiktok.com/usds-about/) meant to keep US users' data away from China. That effort is not yet fully implemented. The US intelligence community has long warned that Chinese ownership of TikTok poses a national security threat. But the app continues to grow in the US, where 170 million Americans use it.

House Republicans and many Democrats are carrying forward with a vote on a new law that would, like Trump's executive orders, force ByteDance to spin TikTok off within roughly five months or bar it from US app stores.

Trump, however, now says Facebook, not TikTok, is "an enemy of the people" and opposes, or at least doesn't seem to care much about forcing ByteDance to spin TikTok off.

"Frankly, there are a lot of people on TikTok that love it," Trump said in that CNBC interview. "There are a lot of young kids on TikTok who will go crazy without it."

Biden, meanwhile, has suggested he would sign the bill to potentially ban TikTok, although senators may instead consider an alternative. Free speech advocates [*like the ACLU*](https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-slams-house-for-latest-plan-to-ban-tiktok-and-stifle-free-speech#:~:text=The%20ACLU%20has%20repeatedly%20explained,And%20the%20courts%20have%20agreed.) have argued banning an app where millions of Americans express themselves would violate the First Amendment. So expect legal challenges if the law is passed. CNN's Brian Fung has a [*more in-depth look*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/08/tech/tiktok-ban-congress-house-biden-trump/index.html) at the proposed bill and whether it would actually ban TikTok.

A further element to consider is Trump's recent meeting with the GOP donor Jeff Yass, who has been reported to have a large stake in TikTok and so has a financial interest in squashing the House bill. Yass has also said he is a longtime advocate for free speech and opposes targeting TikTok on those grounds.

Former Trump aide [*Steve Bannon*](https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/donald-trump-now-sees-possible-tiktok-ban-as-tough-decision-5c596518) went so far as to suggest that Trump changed his mind on TikTok because of Yass. But Trump told CNBC the two did not even discuss the app.

"I met with him very briefly. I made a speech and I said hello to him and his wife was lovely," Trump said, adding that they talked about her ideas on education.

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