

# [***How the Biden campaign is breaking with the Obama reelection model***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B7G-CYJ1-DY7V-G00J-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Washington (CNN) &#8212; President [*Joe Biden's*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) campaign has a message for impatient Democrats who want to see his campaign [*build out its operations*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/02/politics/biden-campaign-strategy-trump-2024/index.html) in the battleground states more visibly and with greater urgency.

That message: Don't expect us to be Barack Obama.

The Biden reelection campaign is rejecting the political organizing model that Obama used during his campaign for a second term in 2012, in which Obama largely shunned the Democratic National Committee and opted instead to set up his own vast electioneering machine.

Biden advisers, campaign officials and state Democratic leaders tell CNN that the president's [*2024 operation is coming together differently*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/21/politics/biden-campaign-strategy/index.html) - and Democrats who are pushing for more hiring and more offices faster are missing the point, they say.

"State parties and local organizations were not part of the equation in 2012," said New Hampshire Democratic Party chairman Ray Buckley. "The fact that the president has heavily invested in building up the strength of the state parties versus what happened in the first term of Obama - I think you're going see the results of that."

The campaign's mission to deliver Biden another four years at the White House came into clearer focus after Trump won the New Hampshire primary last week. The Biden team declared that the former president had all but locked up the Republican nomination and announced that the president's two top West Wing aides would soon be dispatched to the campaign full time.

By Thursday, the Biden campaign had announced state leadership teams in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, Michigan, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Arizona - the full roster of its battleground states. Wisconsin and Arizona are currently serving as the campaign's pilot states for testing out organizing programs aimed at reaching critical voting blocs like young people and Black and Latino voters - infrastructure that, if deemed successful, would be replicated elsewhere.

"The people that they put together for the leadership team in Wisconsin are connected to just about every Democratic leader, officeholder, candidates and operatives in the state," said Ben Wikler, chairman of the Wisconsin Democratic Party. "Everyone in Wisconsin Democratic ***politics*** now has someone that they know that they can call that represents the president."

Biden's end of 2023 fundraising report out Thursday showed the campaign with nearly $46 million on hand, and hiring that had grown from 38 staff to 70 over the course of the fourth quarter. But for some fretting Democrats in battleground states, numbers like that and promises of more on-the-ground presence have only sharpened frustration that they have not seen much to date.

Party leaders and strategists in critical battleground states say they are preparing for November to seriously test their states' existing political apparatus. To that end, in some states that are expected to be the most competitive and politically consequential in November, the Biden campaign is looking to capitalize on Democrats' big wins in the most recent midterm races.

The idea, campaign officials say, is to build off Democrats' robust mobilization efforts in competitive 2022 Senate races in states like Georgia, Nevada, Arizona and Pennsylvania, or successful gubernatorial contests in Wisconsin and Michigan, to help drive up turnout in November's presidential election.

For almost a year, top Biden officials have been planning for much more extensive outreach through social media and other online outlets, reasoning that people are ever more swayed by seeing who their friends and family are supporting.

The campaign hopes its plans will result in a larger online footprint than the famously digitally revolutionary Obama campaigns - though Biden campaign aides have long stressed that they see those efforts as additions, and not replacements, to field organizing.

Morgan Jackson, a Democratic strategist in North Carolina, said there is an eagerness across state parties to work in conjunction with the Biden campaign and the DNC heading into the fall - an experience that was often lacking during Obama's 2012 reelection campaign.

The Obama group competed for staff and donors while assembling its own infrastructure and plans, while the former president and his top political advisers, still suspicious of the DNC as part of the party establishment Obama saw himself as taking on, essentially allowed the existing structure to atrophy.

Several top DNC officials at the time complained that they were ignored by Obama, while state parties complained they were starved for resources. And whatever operations were technically left under the DNC for legal or fundraising purposes were fully at the direction of the Obama campaign, with his former White House political director in place as the DNC executive director.

"One of the big challenges in 2012 was a national competition and rub between (Organizing For Action) and the state parties. It felt like people were often competing with each other on who could do what rather than being collaborative," Jackson said. "Instead of building an entirely new vehicle, I think it's smart to rely on an infrastructure that's there."

That reliance, strategists say, could save the Biden campaign resources as it gears up for a rematch against Trump.

But many experienced Democratic operatives nervously watching from afar and even some Biden campaign aides privately say while that's all well and good, it's time to start spending.

Conserving funds for what's expected to be a grinding campaign through November makes sense - but only to a point, they argue, saying a challenging race against Trump is precisely why they'd like to see more action from the campaign already underway.

Jim Messina, Obama's 2012 campaign manager, [*previously told CNN*](https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2023/07/13/politics/biden-reelection-campaign/index.html) that he believes the Obama campaign spent too much too early.

Some have expressed concern that running in the pandemic in 2020 - when Democrats largely scrapped door knocking and other traditional voter contact - might have dulled some Biden operatives to the critical nature of some of those mobilization efforts.

Others familiar with campaign operations also cried irony when the January campaign staffing shake-up was described as a way of stepping up the pace of field operations, with Jen O'Malley Dillon, Biden's 2020 general election campaign manager, [*departing the White House for the Wilmington, Delaware, headquarters.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/23/politics/jen-omalley-dillon-will-move-over-to-biden-campaign-sooner-than-expected/index.html)

Though O'Malley Dillon will now shift fully into ***politics***, she remained deeply engaged with campaign operations throughout her time in the West Wing. Some involved in the campaign told CNN that there were often instances when plans were delayed because they were waiting for sign off from O'Malley Dillon, Anita Dunn and other top White House aides.

One senior Democratic strategist with knowledge of the Biden campaign strategy described running anxiety within Democratic circles that the reelection has been slow to hire and build out the state teams and infrastructure.

The recent announcements of hires in states like Nevada and North Carolina - in addition to the news of O'Malley Dillon and senior Biden adviser Mike Donilon moving to the campaign - were seen by some nervous Democrats as a "move to shore up people's confidence and signal there is a plan for state work and that the campaign is not going to be exclusively in Delaware," they said.

By MJ Lee and Edward-Isaac Dovere, CNN

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