

# [***Opinion: What Trump's VP shortlist reveals***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BD0-KRC1-DY7V-G004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Former President Donald Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, teased the media during a Fox News town hall Tuesday by acknowledging that there were at least six people on his shortlist for the vice presidency.

The list includes a few of his former primary opponents who have since dropped out of the race - Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina - along with former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, Rep. Byron Donalds of Florida, and South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem. When Fox News host Laura Ingraham asked if the six individuals were on his shortlist, Trump confirmed, "They are. Honestly all of those people are good. They're all good, they're all solid."

Of course, any statement of this sort should be taken with a massive grain of salt when it comes from Trump, a politician who loves to steal the media spotlight and engage in disinformation and outright deception.

It is entirely possible that Trump doesn't have any intention of bringing on board some of the candidates Ingraham had floated and just didn't say. It is also likely that he has others in mind. Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, who recently led the charge against [*three university presidents*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/11/politics/elise-stefanik-antisemitism-hearing/index.html) during congressional hearings on antisemitism and free speech, for instance, has also been floated as a possible running mate.

Either way, the comment helped generate headlines while diminishing his former UN ambassador Nikki Haley's stature as a competitor ahead of the GOP primary in South Carolina.

If the names are in fact representative, however, they could suggest that Trump is aiming to appeal to various constituencies such as Black and Latino voters that Democrats have counted on for decades and trying to win over [*independents who have been*](https://www.politico.com/news/2024/01/23/trump-moderate-republicans-problem-00137112)[*lukewarm*](https://poll.qu.edu/poll-release?releaseid=3890) about his candidacy. In contrast to the ultraconservative, White and evangelical Christian Mike Pence, Trump's former vice president, the new list includes women, an Indian American and Black Americans.

Stepping into the mind of the marketer-in-chief, it is plain to see that these selections would in many instances cut against Trump's existing image, and that of the GOP, as being the candidate and party of rural, evangelical,working-class White Americans.The only exception would be DeSantis - whose base arguably overlaps with Trump's the most - though his relative youth might theoretically foster a new generation of anti-establishment Republican voters. (DeSantis, however, [*told*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/21/us/politics/desantis-trump-conservative-media.html) supporters during a call Wednesday that he did not want to be Trump's VP.)

With Democrats locked in an endless debate over whether they are stuck with a candidate who is too old and out of touch with younger and more progressive voters, along with a vice president who is no longer seen as a new, rising star, the aforementioned shortlist signals that Trump could bring in some relatively fresh blood and - despite his 77 years of age - liven up his campaign by promoting the future of the GOP.

Could this strategy work? Perhaps. Polls have suggested [*increased support*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/09/19/trump-poll-support-black-hispanic/) for the former president among Black and Latino voters. And as a result of the division over the Israel-Hamas war, there are fears that [*younger progressive voters*](https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4368796-the-memo-trump-gets-surprise-boost-with-young-voters-amid-biden-disillusionment/) might boycott voting for Biden due to his support for Israel or even consider voting for Trump instead.

But Democrats would do well not to get too caught up in the predictable frenzy over Trump's choice of VP. They need to focus on developing their own plan for 2024 rather than obsessing over perceptions of Trump's political power.

And it's worth keeping in mind that regardless of who the nominee is, vice presidential picks [*don't*](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/historians-weigh-role-of-vice-presidential-candidates)[*historically matter*](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/history-shows-running-mates-don-t-help-much-kamala-harris-n1236544)[*much to election outcomes*](https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/04/election-2016-vice-president-selection-matters-less-than-you-think-213805), especially in the modern era, when it is no longer key to have a ticket with regional balance. The election will most likely be decided by what voters think about Trump and Biden, not Harris and whoever Trump chooses as his second-in-command.

Moreover, nobody will do more to make certain that the Republican VP pick is of minimal importance than Trump himself. As his primary opponents, and President Biden, quickly learned, it is almost impossible to outshine Trump.

The chaos candidate has an unyielding desire to keep all attention on himself; he can't stand to let the eyes and ears of reporters turn to anyone else, even staunch allies. And so far, he has managed to turn four indictments and multiple trials into a campaign opportunity. The most dangerous place to be, as the saying goes, is between him and a television camera.

And, finally, policy matters. The chaos and dysfunction of Trump's administration and the many congressional Republicans who since adopted the former president's style of ***politics*** will make it difficult for the GOP to significantly expand its coalition.

For all the talk coming out of the party, the policy agenda has remained staunchly to the right, and often at odds with where independents and even some more moderate Republicans stand. The Supreme Court's Dobbs decision in 2022 brought a jackhammer to women's reproductive rights, a decision that continues to reverberate in elections.

Democrats have also fared well in the 2018 midterms, the 2020 presidential election, the 2022 midterms and the 2023 and 2024 special elections, in large part because Republican candidates have been too extreme. The candidates on Trump's alleged short list are generally hard-right on most of these core issues. Regardless of who is chosen, it will be difficult to repackage Trump as being less reactionary than his first term when ongoing rhetoric suggests otherwise.

On the issue of [*democracy*](https://abcnews.go.com/538/americans-democracy-peril-2024-election/story?id=106803471), many voters are clearly worried that the GOP will not ensure the stability and integrity of our elections and the peaceful transfer of power, upon which this country depends.

Democrats need to take a deep breath before shifting into panic mode - a habit they'll likely have to practice repeatedly in the coming months. With the VP list, Trump's comments should be taken in stride. Even if he is being truthful about the shortlist, the odds are that none of those VP picks will end up having a profound effect on who sits in the Oval Office come January 2025

Opinion by Julian Zelizer, CNN

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