



**America Votes 2024:
The Transatlantic Impact**
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**Could the Middle East Affect the US
Election?**

Ian Lesser

Could the Middle East Affect the US Election?

By Ian Lesser | 1.19.24

Foreign policy has rarely been a preoccupation for American voters. But the Biden administration's approach to events in the Middle East could prove to be an exception in the 2024 presidential campaign.

The United States has been the indispensable member of NATO since the alliance's founding, but this is a commonplace observation that American elections are not decided on foreign policy. This is a reasonable starting point in thinking through the political implications of current conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere in a critical election year. In all likelihood, US policy toward the unfolding crisis in Gaza and mounting frictions with Iran will not be high on the agenda for American voters in November. But the traditional calculus regarding the role of foreign policy could be tested in the current campaign.

Even in a highly polarized political environment, support for Israel remains an article of faith for most of the US electorate. It is literally so in much of the Jewish community and, more importantly, among evangelical Christians. The foreign policy elite may debate the merits of Israel's devastating war in Gaza following the horrific Hamas attacks, and some may seek a different approach from Washington. But among the electorate, the Biden administration's policy will likely continue to enjoy broad support. Republican candidates will not find much to exploit here. Of course, a lot may change between now and November 2024, and anything perceived as an inadequate response to Iranian aggression or terrorism could expose the administration to criticism from the right. But the White House does not seem inclined to passivity in the face of these threats.

Polling suggests that young, progressive voters are more inclined to be critical of Israel and, perhaps, to question Biden's generally supportive stance. All things being equal, these voters are important to Democratic turnout in 2024. In a very close race, their ambivalence could work against the presidential incumbent and Democratic candidates in the House and the Senate. But will these young voters really refrain from voting in a rematch between Biden and Trump?

The 2024 election outcome may be critical for US policy toward Russia and the war in Ukraine. It is less likely to affect policy toward the Middle East, which has tended to be driven by traditional affinities and crises demanding attention. That said, there are some wild cards worth watching. These include the potential for significant terrorist attacks, inspired by events in the region, in the United States or on American targets elsewhere, or a direct confrontation with Iran. These could be major tests in the run-up to the election, capable of galvanizing public attention to foreign and security policy. Policy itself might not change, but events could upset the traditional, secondary role of international issues in election outcomes.

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