



## How Mike Pence Could Make the Election Closer Than Expected

**After one of the most divisive primary battles in U.S. history, will a Trump-Pence ticket help the GOP unify?**

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There's been nothing traditional about Donald Trump's run for the White House, and his [Twitter announcement](#) of Indiana Gov. Mike Pence as his running mate continues that trend. However, the move shows exactly why Trump picked Pence over his other short-list picks, Chris Christie and Newt Gingrich. Where Trump is impulsive and hot-tempered, Pence is even-handed, predictable and unflappable. And, to the religious right's great relief, Pence is utterly unabashed in his belief that abortion should be illegal and that Planned Parenthood should no longer exist.

If the evangelical wing of the GOP had its way, Pence would be a top choice to lead the presidential ticket, not just be the second tier. He's been a favorite with the Family Research Council's "values voters" crowd [for years](#), and in 2010 [he won first place in the presidential straw poll](#), when, as a House member from Indiana, he declared, "I am a Christian, a conservative and a Republican — in that order." That year he beat out big names like Mike Huckabee, Gingrich and Mitt Romney, but rather than run for the nation's top office like those other politicians (who all failed to block President Obama from a second term), Pence rolled his House experience into a run at the Indiana governor's mansion.

[He only barely made it](#), but he's used his years as governor to continue an agenda of strict social conservatism that he championed in the House — especially when it comes to sexual health and reproductive rights. [As Laura Bassett reported at the \*Huffington Post\*](#), Pence became known in Congress for writing bills to defund Planned Parenthood at a federal level, to draft a nationwide requirement for a mandatory ultrasound prior to every abortion, and to redefine rape as "forcible" in order to block more victims of sexual assault from being able to use insurance to help fund an abortion.

With Democrats in control of the Senate, Pence's anti-abortion antics were all bluster, no bite, but once he was ensconced in the deep-red legislature of Indiana they became far more effective. Between statewide Planned Parenthood defunding and a [myriad of new abortion restrictions](#), under his governorship [Indiana saw HIV levels rise, clinics close](#) and even [a woman jailed and charged with feticide](#) for allegedly inducing her own abortion.

Between his enthusiastic endorsement of Indiana's "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" — a bill he claimed he had no idea would be used to discriminate against the LGBT community but signed in the presence of a number of anti-gay activists — and his obsessive anti-abortion crusade, Pence may be the one vice presidential candidate able to assuage the suspicions of a social conservative movement highly dubious about Trump's alleged rebirth as a born-again, pro-life, "traditional marriage"-loving politician. Those in the anti-abortion movement, especially, who had remained skeptical about Trump's new "true believer" status now see Pence as the bait that will finally allow them to actively support the GOP ticket.

"Mr. Trump's selection of Gov. Mike Pence as his Vice President is an affirmation of the pro-life commitments he has made and will rally the pro-life grassroots," Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the anti-abortion Susan B. Anthony List, said in a statement Thursday, after news of Trump's pick first leaked. "Gov. Pence is a proven pro-life champion both during his time in Congress and as Governor of Indiana. . . . Mike Pence is a pro-life trailblazer and Mr. Trump could not have made a better choice."

And unlike Gingrich or Christie, Pence offers the fiscal conservative side of the Republican Party someone to applaud, allowing them to continue to ignore right-wing bigotry and misogyny as long as their taxes stay low. Pence "was only one of four governors who received a grade of 'A'" in the conservative Cato Institute's 2014 Fiscal Policy Report Card on America's Governors; the group called him a "solid" fiscal conservative. Even better, Pence doesn't come with the baggage of multiple ex-wives or federal probes.

Between Pence as the presumptive vice presidential nominee and the new language calling for an all-out defunding of Planned Parenthood in the proposed Republican Party platform, the GOP appears finally ready to unify after one of the most vitriolic and divisive primary battles in U.S. history.

If so, this could be a much closer race than anyone ever expected.