



Republican Vice Presidential Nominee Mike Pence: A Political Profile

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Indiana Governor Mike Pence was born on June 7, 1959, in Columbus, Indiana. His family was Irish Catholic and Democratic and had President John F. Kennedy as one of their political icons. As a student at Hanover College, however, Pence would join a campus evangelical group, thus setting his personal politics on a path starkly different from that of his upbringing. He was elected to Congress in 2000 and represented Indiana's 6th congressional district for six consecutive terms, throughout which he identified as "a Christian, a conservative and a Republican – in that order." His devout faith and staunch social and economic conservatism brought him to chair the Republican Study Committee - a congressional caucus home to the most conservative members - as well as the House Republican Conference. He also served as a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from 2003 to 2012, where he was selected as vice-chair of the Middle East and South Asia subcommittee in 2011-2012.

Pence left Congress and was elected as Governor of the State of Indiana in 2012 after first pondering a presidential run. His conservative record as governor is consistent with that of his tenure in Congress. Indeed, he succeeded to pass some of the steepest tax cuts in Indiana's history. He also sought to advance his conservative social agenda, including last year's Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) – legislation that was interpreted as blatant discrimination against the LGBT community. The resulting fallout from the RFRA has seen Pence's approval rating plummet over 20 points into the 40% range. According to pundits, this explains his decision to forgo re-election later this year, opting instead for a spot on the Republican presidential ticket with the party's controversial nominee, Donald Trump.

Middle East Policy Positions

Mr. Pence is not known for his extensive foreign policy experience by any standard. Nevertheless, his modest record on foreign affairs reveals policy positions consistent with those of the conservative branch of the Republican establishment. His "America First" policy calls for a powerful military that enjoys a robust spending budget. Indeed, the former congressman only reserved his ardent criticism of congressional spending for non-military items. He has denounced Mr. Trump's proposal to ban all Muslims from entering the US, describing the policy as "offensive and unconstitutional." Yet, as governor he worked to prevent Syrian refugees from resettling in the state of Indiana. He has criticized

Democrats for refusing to use the term “Islamic extremism,” and holds a decidedly pro-Israel voting record on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Israel: Throughout Pence’s public service, he has been viewed by Republican Party insiders as a reliable and steadfast ally of Israel and specifically Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government. The governor has said that his strong support of Israel stems from his evangelical Christian beliefs, as well as his ties with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). As governor of Indiana, he visited Israel on a state trade mission in 2014 where he met with Netanyahu, but more notably, he declined to meet privately with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas after having a public dinner with him because “that was not the purpose of the trip.”

Stateside, however, Pence’s support for Israel has not always been reciprocated from the American Jewish community, particularly in the governor’s home state. Pence’s district is home to two historic synagogues that have served as symbols to the local Jewish communities for over 50 years. But in 2009, not only was he yet to visit these synagogues – as is common practice among pro-Israel politicians – he also told an American Israel Public Affairs Committee conference that “I know of no synagogues in my district.” Unsurprisingly, these comments generated significant backlash from some of his Jewish constituents.

It is likely that Pence’s popularity among the Christian right factored into Trump’s decision to tap the governor as his vice presidential choice. Evangelicals and social conservatives have been wary of the presidential candidate due to his claims of neutrality over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as his more progressive stances on social issues like abortion and LGBT rights. Having Pence on the ticket could allay some of these concerns by the radical right. But in a country where approximately 70 percent of its Jewish population vote Democratic, Pence’s lack of strong ties with his own Jewish constituency must be weighed when examining Republican efforts to sway these religious voter blocs.

Palestine: In 2012, the Arab American Institute assigned to the Republican vice presidential nominee a rating of “-6” on Arab-Israeli issues. The rating is based on his voting record while a member of the 112th Congress and indicates a stance that is anti-Arab/anti-Palestine. And in addition to the aforementioned snub of President Abbas, as governor, Pence also signed into law a bill that would require the state of Indiana to divest from any organization that joined the Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) movement, a global grassroots campaign that calls for increased pressure on Israel to end its

occupation of Palestinian lands, grant equal rights to Palestinian citizens, and respect the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Iran: Pence was a vocal opponent of the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran. Last year, he joined 14 other state governors in penning a letter to the president that threatened to continue their enforcement of Iranian sanctions, despite the administration's historic deal.

Iraq: As a congressman in 2002, Mr. Pence voted in favor of the resolution authorizing President George W. Bush to invade Iraq, and subsequently, opposed any measures that would have set a date on the withdrawal of troops. Pence has always been a strong supporter of military spending increases and has made a number of trips to Iraq (and Afghanistan) to spend time with US troops from Indiana. At times, however, he has been accused of being out of touch with the suffering and violence in the region. For instance, during a 2007 visit to Iraq - the country squarely in the midst of a bloody civil war - he spoke at a press conference in a central Baghdad market, commenting that the peacefulness of the atmosphere reminded him of "a normal outdoor market in Indiana in the summertime." In reality, Pence and the rest of the US delegation came escorted by over 100 soldiers, Humvees and attack helicopters, while the congressman was suited with a bullet proof vest and guarded by US snipers.

Pence as Vice President

Trump has no foreign policy experience of any significance. It is too early to tell if he will make foreign policy part of Pence's responsibilities based on his congressional service. Given Trump's ego, he is likely to keep the foreign policy portfolio to himself. However, he is likely to seek Pence's views and advice on some foreign policy and national security issues. With respect to the Middle East, Pence's perspectives as congressman do not justify the slightest optimism regarding a more enlightened or evenhanded US policy in the Middle East in a potential Trump Administration.