



***TRUMP OR HARRIS: THE NEXT  
PRESIDENT MUST WIN THE SPACE  
INDUSTRIAL BASE RACE***

BY ALEXANDER WILLIAM SALTER

*Alexander William Salter*  
([alexander.w.salter@ttu.edu](mailto:alexander.w.salter@ttu.edu)) is an associate professor of economics in the Rawls College of Business at Texas Tech University and a research fellow with TTU's Free Market Institute.

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You've probably heard about the problems with America's industrial base. But what about our [space industrial base](#)?

The next few decades portend a [second space race with](#) geopolitical foes such as China and Russia. Although we face major supply-chain and labor-pipeline [challenges](#), the situation is hardly grim. America has a window of opportunity to make the strategic investments to ensure the final frontier remains [open, free, and amenable to commerce](#).

Concerns about the state of the nation's [industrial base](#) are hardly new. While there were good reasons for structural economic changes, as the wealth gains from economizing on manufacturing labor and capital were significant, there is more to public policy than economic efficiency. Resilience and defense capabilities matter just as much.

Rather than lament our nation's industrial situation, we should view the upcoming years as a chance to do better. We don't need to double down on the production and distribution methods of the past. Instead, we can build a genuinely inclusive economy capable of [creating enormous wealth](#) and meeting [international strategic challenges](#).

Strengthening the space-industrial base doesn't mean limiting employment opportunities to college graduates. We need more engineers and scientists to continue the revolution in small-satellite constellations, which have enormous commercial and military potential. But we also need sheet metal workers, pipe welders, and a host of other skilled jobs that don't require a college degree. SpaceX, the most successful commercial space company in the world and America's chief geopolitical space asset, is eager to hire these workers [to build Starship, its next-generation superheavy launch vehicle](#). Returning to the [moon](#) and progressing to [Mars](#) depends on our ability to harness both university and trade-school talents.

Whoever wins the presidential election in November must make space infrastructure a priority. China, our [chief opponent in space](#), is becoming increasingly aggressive and capable in its space operations. Russia's willingness to [weaponize orbit](#) makes it nearly as dangerous. Republicans and Democrats should be able to agree that maintaining America's space dominance is a priority.

Yet the parties do not have equally impressive recent records on space policy—Republicans have accomplished much more. The Trump administration issued seven major [space policy directives](#) on an array of issues, such as putting space commerce on a more secure foundation, establishing responsible practices for space traffic management and, of course, establishing the US Space Force. Several [executive orders](#) revamped America's space strategy and worked toward creating a system of property rights for outer space resources. Vice President [Mike Pence](#) capably guided and participated in National Space Council activities. The years 2016 to 2020 were arguably the most consequential years for American space policy since Apollo 11.

Unfortunately, the Biden administration failed to keep the momentum going. It has continued most of Trump's endeavors but has not solidified or extended the gains of recent years. Vice President Harris was [notably unenthusiastic](#) about taking charge of the space policy portfolio. There is no evidence she will change if elected president. The best that can be

said about Democrats' approach to space is that they are not overtly hostile to innovative policy. But this is hardly the forward-looking attitude we need to achieve our nation's vital space interests.

If Trump returns to the White House, [JD Vance](#) will likely take point on space policy. Vance has been [outspoken in his calls](#) for restoring the US industrial base and [rejuvenating the middle class](#). Frankly, this cannot be done through structural economic regression. The American economy will never again look like it did during the decades after World War II. But Vance's optimism and policy fluency position him well to push for a [common-good economic agenda](#) that prioritizes space.

As we've seen, winning the next space race requires concerted cooperation among PhDs and trade-school graduates, entrepreneurs and civil servants, military and civilian professionals. Democrats claim the mantle of the "opportunity economy," yet Republicans may be better positioned to deliver, while meeting 21st-century geopolitical objectives at the same time.

"Control of space means control of the world," was a Cold War adage. This was hyperbole 60 years ago, but it rings true today. Our lives increasingly depend on an array of communication and logistics services from orbital assets. There are [extraordinary](#) scientific and commercial possibilities even deeper into the final frontier. We can reap these benefits if we work now to build the terrestrial infrastructure for celestial power.

Winning the new space race will require the best from Americans in every walk of life. We need a real diversity of skills, backgrounds, and talents. The GOP has positioned itself to ensure that a hopeful space future is open to all. It remains to be seen whether Democrats will do the same.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*