

One of the abiding issues in governance is the balance between democratic leadership and experts. We don't want government solely by technocrats. Nor do we want government steered solely by ideology and politics, as under Trump. Biden will be a vast improvement, but there's still some question about whether he'll get the balance right.

I wrote earlier about [the trend](#) toward presidential administration, which shifts authority toward the White House and away from agencies like EPA which have deep expertise. It seems to me that this trend may already have gone a bit too far. If anything, Biden seems to be moving further down the same path. His presidency opened with an unprecedented wave of executive orders giving extensive marching orders to agencies. I applaud the substance of those orders, but I do worry about the tendency to set agency agendas entirely from above. On the same note, Biden moved quickly to install White House "czars" to oversee key areas of policy. To the extent I can judge, those czars are highly capable people like Gina McCarthy for climate. Still, it seems telling to me that Biden has appointed a White House coronavirus czar but hasn't gotten around to choosing an FDA Commissioner. John Kerry will be a great climate envoy, but his appointment also undercuts the State Department's role in climate diplomacy. These White House czars, however capable, will not be in daily contact with the scientists, economists, or foreign service members who are in the trenches on these issues.

Biden's agency choices so far have been a generally impressive group, a tremendous improvement over Trump's crew of scofflaws. Probably no one in America could match Janet Yellen's credentials at Treasury or Merrick Garland at Justice. A dissonant note, however, has been an odd mismatch between the expertise of a few nominees and the missions of their agencies. Xavier Becerra, the nominee to head Health and Human Services, is a fine lawyer, but he's not an expert on healthcare funding or public health. Jennifer Granholm and David Turk, who will lead the Department of Energy, are inspiring choices in terms of clean energy. It's a bit odd, however, that neither of them has any expertise in the nuclear weapons issues that are its largest responsibility.

I don't want to exaggerate my concerns about the future role of expertise under Biden. As I said, he's obviously a vast improvement over his predecessor on this score. It's very early days yet for the Biden Administration. It's not easy to figure out the right balance between experts and political leadership. While Trump obviously went way too far in one direction, some people have argued Obama was a little *too* deferential to the technocrats. Hopefully, Biden will manage the balancing act successfully as the administration moves forward.