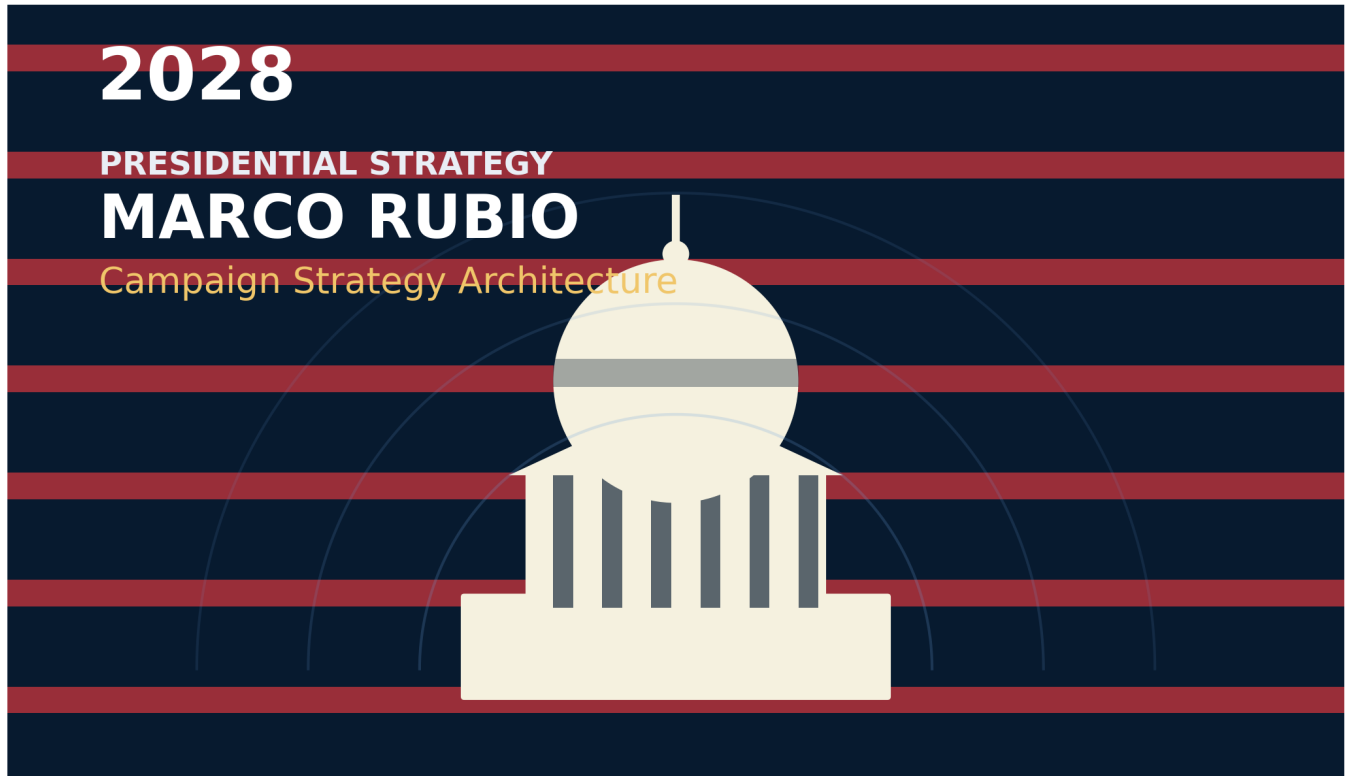


As-of date: 2026-08-18



MARCO RUBIO 2028

Presidential Campaign Strategy Architecture

Systematic Analysis of Political Positioning, Primary Coalition, Message, Foreign Policy, Economic Nationalism, Latino Strategy, Organization, and the Electoral College

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RESEARCH NOTE

This report is a neutral strategic-analysis document, not an endorsement, voter recommendation, or ranking of candidates. Candidate comparisons summarize public evidence, polling, institutional position, and third-party reporting. Strategic language is presented as hypothetical scenario analysis, not advocacy.

Executive Summary

FACT Marco Rubio is the 72nd U.S. Secretary of State. White House records also identify him as Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor / Acting National Security Advisor, placing him at the junction of diplomacy, intelligence, military policy, and presidential decision-making. [S1-S4]

FACT As of the report date, Rubio has not launched a 2028 presidential campaign. Recent public reporting says he has stated that he has no plans to run and would support JD Vance if Vance runs. His legacy presidential committee reported \$0 receipts and \$0 disbursements from January 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026; his Reclaim America leadership PAC was active but small relative to a national presidential apparatus. [S5, S14-S15]

FACT Polling nevertheless shows a meaningful reservoir of Republican interest: Emerson measured Vance 36%, Rubio 35% in May 2026 and 39%-38% in July; the July UNH New Hampshire poll had Vance 36%, Rubio 26%. A CPAC straw poll had Vance 53%, Rubio 35%, but CPAC is not representative of the full Republican electorate. [S10-S13]

INFERENCE The central strategic paradox is that Rubio's governmental strength may reduce his near-term campaign freedom. His current roles give him unparalleled policy visibility and a "serious governing" brand, but they also bind him to the successes, costs, and controversies of Trump administration foreign policy and make open political organizing harder.

INFERENCE Rubio's economic evolution is more than a sudden 2028 repositioning. His advocacy of common-good capitalism and a pro-American industrial policy dates to 2019-20; later China-focused trade and investment proposals deepened that direction. The evidence supports a genuine substantive realignment toward economic nationalism, while the intensity of Trump-aligned rhetoric is also plausibly strategic adaptation to the party's post-2016 coalition. [S19-S22]

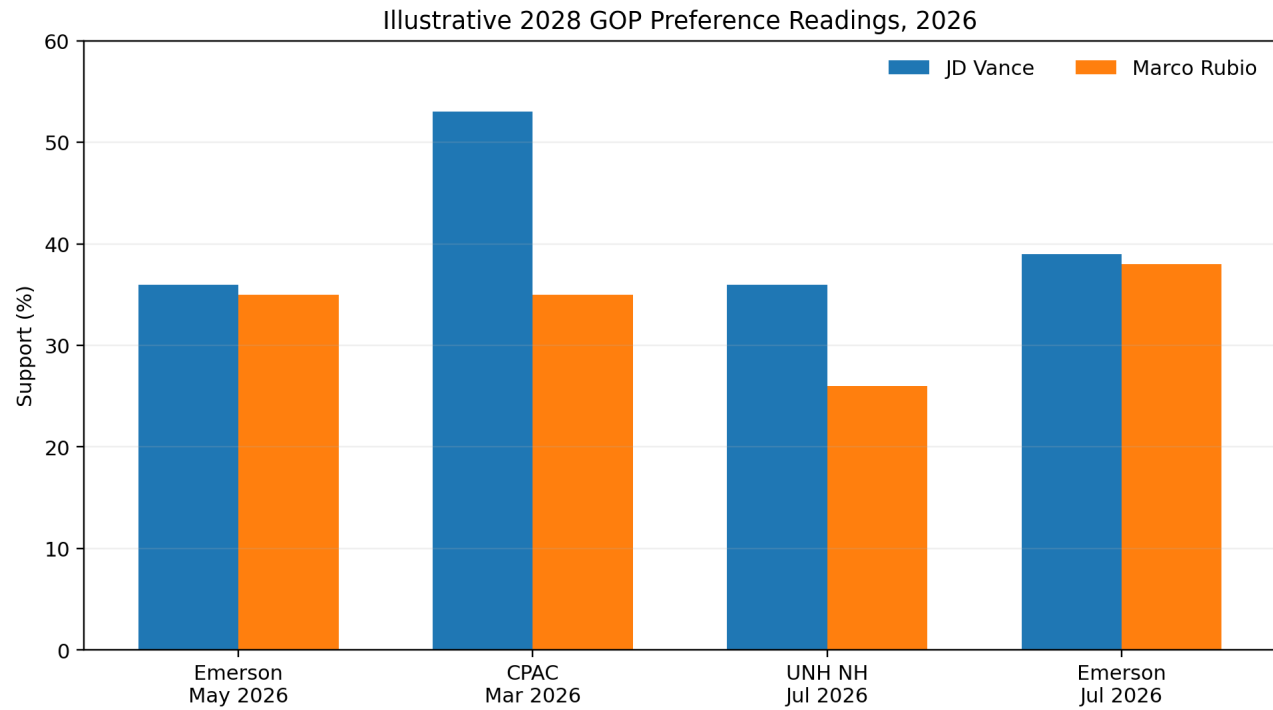
SCENARIO If Rubio actually enters, his most coherent lane is not a restoration of pre-Trump Republicanism. It is a synthesis: an institutionalized, disciplined America First candidate who emphasizes working-class economics, border control, family policy, China competition, and alliance-based "peace through strength." His Cuban-American story can broaden the narrative, but cannot substitute for origin-specific Latino outreach.

SCENARIO The early-state plan in this report assumes an Iowa-New Hampshire opening followed by Nevada/South Carolina and Super Tuesday because that is the traditional Republican pattern. The Republican 2028 calendar had not been finalized as of July 24, 2026; AP reported that Republicans were expected to retain Iowa and New Hampshire at the front. [S31]

Bottom-line strategic architecture

Dimension	Evidence-based reading as of 2026-08-18
Political position	Cabinet-level and White House national-security authority; unusually strong governing credential for a potential successor.
Trump relationship	From bitter 2016 rival to trusted executor. The relationship is now a major asset in a Trump-shaped primary, but creates ownership of administration outcomes.
Primary competition	Vance is the most structurally advantaged successor if he runs; Rubio is the clearest high-profile alternative in current public polling.
Core coalition challenge	Rubio must avoid being trapped between donor-class/traditional Republicans and MAGA working-class voters; he needs both without looking ideologically reversible.
Foreign policy	Strongest differentiator and greatest liability: competence/experience versus interventionist or "neocon" attack frame.
Latino strategy	Potentially additive, especially in Florida and anti-authoritarian diaspora networks, but not automatically transferable to Mexican-American or Puerto Rican electorates.
General election	A 2024-style Republican base leaves 219 EV outside the seven main battlegrounds. Rubio would need a combination of Sun Belt and Rust Belt states; neither bloc alone automatically reaches 270.
Campaign reality today	Public interest exists; evidence of an active Rubio presidential

organization does not.



Sources: Emerson College Polling; CPAC straw poll reported by Reuters/AP; UNH Granite State Poll.
Not directly comparable: populations, modes, and samples differ; CPAC is a conference straw poll, not a representative primary poll.

Figure 1. Selected 2026 readings illustrate Rubio's emerging demand signal, while differing populations and methods prohibit simple averaging.

1. Methodology, Evidence Rules, and Analytical Labels

This report separates evidence into three categories to reduce the risk that campaign speculation is presented as fact. Public information is current through the as-of date above. Where 2028 rules or candidate decisions are unresolved, the document explicitly treats them as scenarios rather than established conditions.

Label	Definition	Use in this report
FACT	A proposition directly supported by official records, named-source reporting, election returns, financial filings, or transparent polling.	Current office, FEC activity, historical results, public statements, poll topline.
INFERENCE	A reasoned interpretation drawn from multiple facts but not directly knowable as an objective fact.	Ideological evolution, likely coalition fit, brand implications, organizational constraints.
SCENARIO	A contingent future path whose conditions have not yet occurred.	Trump endorsement branches, hypothetical slogans, early-state sequence, Electoral College paths.

Polling is treated as a snapshot, not a forecast. Particular caution is applied to very early 2028 trial heats, subgroup estimates, nonrepresentative straw polls, and comparisons across different modes. The report reports field dates, population, sample size, methodology and error range when publicly available. The analysis does not turn a one-point difference inside a margin of error into a meaningful “lead.”

Candidate comparisons are descriptive. They identify structural advantages, constraints, issue contrasts, and evidence from third-party sources; they are not expressions of the authors’ political preference or recommendations to voters.

Polling notes

Poll / date	Population & sample	Topline	Method / uncertainty
Emerson, May 24-25 2026	U.S. likely voters n=1,000; likely GOP primary n=432	Vance 36, Rubio 35, DeSantis 5, Haley 5, undecided 15	MMS text-to-web + PureSpectrum panel; weighted to Census/voter-file parameters; GOP subgroup credibility interval +/-4.7 pp. [S10]
Emerson, Jul 19-20 2026	U.S. likely voters n=1,100; GOP subgroup size not stated on release page	Vance 39, Rubio 38, DeSantis 5, Donald Trump Jr. 5, undecided 9	MMS text-to-web + PureSpectrum; overall credibility interval +/-2.9 pp; subgroup interval higher. [S11]
UNH Granite State, Jul 15-20 2026	NH residents n=1,458; likely GOP primary n=579	Vance 36, Rubio 26, Paul 8, Haley 8, DeSantis 6	Online UNH Granite State Poll; GOP subgroup MOE about +/-4.1 pp. [S12]
CPAC, Mar 2026	More than 1,600 conference attendees	Vance 53, Rubio 35; others below 2	Informal conference straw poll; not representative and not a nomination forecast. [S13]
Reuters/Ipsos, Apr 24-27 2026	U.S. adults n=1,269	Vance favorable 35/unfavorable 54; Rubio favorable 33/unfavorable 45; Rubio “not heard of” 19	Probability-based KnowledgePanel; English; weighted on demographics, 2024 vote and party ID; overall MOE +/-2.9 pp. [S35]

2. Current Political Position and the Reality of a 2028 Candidacy

2.1 Office, authority, and influence

FACT Rubio became Secretary of State after resigning his Florida Senate seat on January 20, 2025. The House historical biography records service in the Florida House from 2000-08, including Speaker from 2006-08, and U.S. Senate service from 2011 until his Cabinet transition. [S16]

FACT White House personnel records list Rubio as “Assistant to the President and National Security Advisor,” while other White House materials have used “Acting National Security Advisor.” This is institutionally unusual because it combines State Department leadership with the White House national-security coordinating role. [S3-S4]

INFERENCE That dual-hatted status creates a potential presidential credential that neither a governor nor most senators can replicate: he can claim proximity to decisions on alliances, war termination, China, intelligence, Latin America, sanctions, and trade-security integration. The same proximity gives opponents a clear accountability line for any unpopular outcome.

2.2 Has Rubio actually begun a 2028 campaign?

FACT No formal candidacy is established. Axios reported on August 13, 2026 that Rubio said he has no plans to run and would endorse Vance if the vice president runs. Earlier reporting showed more ambiguity, but the later statement is more probative for the current as-of date. [S5-S6]

FACT FEC records for MARCO RUBIO FOR PRESIDENT show \$0 receipts and \$0 disbursements for January 1, 2025-June 30, 2026, \$3,609.89 ending cash, and \$827,657.12 in debts/loans owed by the committee. Reclaim America PAC reported \$116,630.87 in receipts and \$47,304.66 in disbursements over the same period, ending with \$122,137.88 cash. [S14-S15]

INFERENCE Those filings do not resemble a national presidential build-out. They do not prove that no informal donor conversations or political networking exist, but they are strong evidence against describing Rubio as currently running a conventional exploratory campaign through his established federal committees.

FACT By contrast, public reporting documents Vance traveling to Iowa, raising money and campaigning for Republican candidates while his 2028 interest remains formally unannounced. [S9]

SCENARIO A Rubio candidacy becomes materially more plausible if Vance declines, suffers a major political reversal, Trump signals a preference for Rubio, or foreign-policy events sharply raise demand for Rubio’s governing profile.

2.3 Donors and outside networks

Rubio retains historical ties to the donor class from his Senate and 2016 campaigns, but historical donor relationships should not be mislabeled as 2028 commitments. The clearest current public signal is Axios reporting in July 2026 that Ken Griffin said he would support Rubio over Vance; Griffin’s spokesperson declined comment and Rubio had not asked for or received a formal commitment. [S34]

INFERENCE Rubio therefore has plausible access to major-donor capital, but not demonstrated donor consolidation. His challenge would be converting an elite donor network into a coalition that does not reinforce an “establishment restoration” narrative among MAGA voters.

3. Career Foundations and the 2016 Republican Primary

3.1 Florida legislature and U.S. Senate

Rubio’s political biography offers several campaign-ready institutional layers: local government in West Miami; eight years in the Florida House; leadership as majority leader and Speaker; then fourteen years in the U.S. Senate. In the Senate he developed a strong foreign-policy and intelligence profile and chaired the Small Business Committee. [S16-S17]

His personal story remains central to his political brand. AP describes him as the Miami-born son of Cuban immigrants, with a father who worked as a bartender and a mother as a hotel maid; the family also spent part of his childhood in Las Vegas. Rubio is Catholic and has repeatedly framed his biography as an American Dream story. [S17]

3.2 2016 performance: what happened

Contest	Result	Strategic meaning
Iowa caucuses	Rubio 23.1%, third, close behind Trump and winner Ted Cruz	Strong finish generated “establishment consolidation” expectations, but it was momentum rather than an organizational

		victory.
New Hampshire	Rubio about 10.5%, fifth	The Christie debate attack punctured the competence/momentum narrative at exactly the wrong moment.
South Carolina	Rubio about 22.5%, second; Trump won all 50 delegates	Elite endorsements and a respectable vote share did not convert into delegate leverage.
Florida	Trump 45.7%, Rubio 27.0%; Rubio suspended campaign	Home-state defeat damaged the electability argument and branded Rubio as unable to stop Trump on his strongest terrain.

3.3 The “robotic” debate failure

FACT During the February 6, 2016 New Hampshire debate, Chris Christie attacked Rubio for relying on a memorized script. Rubio then repeated substantially the same Obama critique, reinforcing the attack frame in real time. PBS described Rubio as “stuck in a loop.” [S18]

INFERENCE The lasting damage was not merely one bad answer. Rubio’s pre-2016 strength was disciplined message delivery; the debate converted that strength into evidence of inauthenticity. A 2028 campaign would face an unusually low tolerance for visible scripting because opponents and media can instantly reactivate the old clip.

3.4 The five 2016 mistakes a future campaign cannot replicate

- Confusing a strong third-place Iowa finish with durable consolidation: momentum did not equal control of an electoral faction.
- Overreliance on repeated set-piece language during high-pressure exchanges.
- Waiting too long to build a clear anti-Trump or alternative-to-Trump theory, then shifting into personal insults that did not fit Rubio’s brand.
- Allowing endorsements and donor enthusiasm to substitute for a distinctive mass-voter constituency.
- Entering Florida with the campaign’s survival dependent on a home-state winner-take-all test against a candidate with stronger movement attachment.

4. Trump Relationship: Rivalry, Accommodation, and Succession

4.1 From “Little Marco” to high-trust governing partner

FACT In 2016 Trump mocked Rubio as “Little Marco,” while Rubio called Trump a con artist and used personal insults. Rubio later characterized those exchanges as campaign rhetoric, campaigned with Trump in 2024, and ultimately joined his administration. [S17]

INFERENCE The dual appointment to State and the White House national-security role is a stronger indicator of operational trust than rhetorical reconciliation alone. Rubio is no longer best described as an outside traditional Republican tolerating Trump; he is a senior executor of Trump’s second-term foreign policy.

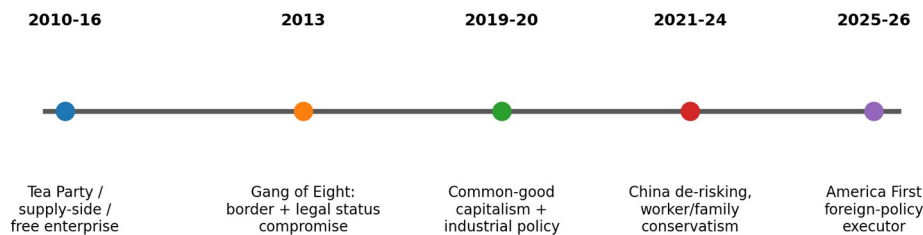
4.2 Three Trump-endorsement branches

Branch	Trigger	Rubio positioning consequence	Main vulnerability
Trump endorses Rubio	Trump explicitly selects Rubio or Vance declines and Trump shifts toward Rubio	“Loyal successor” becomes available without requiring Rubio to relitigate 2016; administration competence and continuity can be foregrounded.	Full ownership of Trump-era outcomes; rivals can attack opportunism and insider status.
Trump endorses another candidate	Most consequentially, Trump backs Vance	Rubio’s stated willingness to support Vance creates a severe entry barrier. A challenge would require a changed circumstance large enough to explain reversal.	Loyalty contradiction; fragmented donor/establishment lane; MAGA voters may treat challenge as disloyal.

Trump remains neutral	Trump continues praising both and delays endorsement	Rubio can run as a loyal governing heir while differentiating on competence, alliances, and presidential readiness.	Vance retains vice-presidential platform, movement credentials, younger base, and head start in political organization.
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5. Ideological Evolution: Reaganite Roots, America First Adaptation, and Economic Nationalism

Rubio Political-Economic Evolution: Continuity and Adaptation



Analytical interpretation: the economic-nationalist turn predates his Cabinet service; Trump-era loyalty and role adaptation are additional, not mutually exclusive, explanations.

Figure 2. Rubio's evolution is better understood as a multi-stage shift than as a single 2028 pivot.

5.1 Earlier profile

Rubio's 2010-16 national image combined Tea Party anti-spending themes, tax and regulatory reform, entrepreneurship, social conservatism, and a relatively internationalist foreign policy. His participation in the 2013 Gang of Eight immigration effort fit a reform-conservative belief that a border-security and legalization bargain could modernize the party's coalition. [S23-S24]

5.2 The economic-nationalist turn

FACT By 2019 Rubio was calling for a "pro-American industrial policy" to meet the China challenge, and in 2020 he publicly defended "common-good capitalism": markets remain important, but economic policy should serve productive capacity, dignified work, family stability, and national resilience. [S19-S20]

FACT By 2024 Rubio was proposing tougher tools against Chinese trade and investment practices, including restrictions aimed at Chinese firms using third-country production to evade U.S. tariffs. Reuters also documented his broader China-focused economic-security agenda. [S21-S22]

INFERENCE The timeline supports a genuine policy realignment: the substantive turn occurred years before a hypothetical 2028 campaign. Strategic adaptation is still visible in rhetoric and coalition emphasis, but the underlying industrial-policy and China-economic-security positions are not newly invented for succession politics.

5.3 Internal contradictions

Constituency / principle	Potential appeal	Potential contradiction
Wall Street / corporate donors	Regulatory competence, tax restraint, geopolitical predictability	Tariffs, China restrictions, buyback/financialization critiques and worker-first rhetoric can conflict with investor preferences.
Technology companies	AI leadership, export strategy, national innovation	China controls, data/security rules, antitrust or industrial-policy conditions can create friction.
Small business	Entrepreneurship, tax simplicity, domestic supply chains	Tariff input costs and immigration enforcement can raise costs for some sectors.

Manufacturing / working class	Industrial policy, reshoring, China competition, family wage	Corporate-donor ties can undermine authenticity; automation and price effects complicate outcomes.
Traditional free-market conservatives	Private enterprise remains part of Rubio's framework	Strategic subsidies, tariffs and national-development policy depart from Reagan-era orthodoxy.

6. Domestic Policy Record: Assets and Liabilities in a 2028 Primary

Issue	Documented record / trajectory	Primary asset	Primary liability
Immigration / border	2013 Gang of Eight role paired legalization/citizenship architecture with border-security triggers; Rubio voted Yea on final passage of S. 744; later politics moved toward much tougher enforcement. [S23-S24, S40]	Can claim experience with both legal immigration systems and enforcement design.	"Amnesty" attack remains easy to communicate in a MAGA primary; policy evolution invites consistency questions.
Economy / trade	From pro-business supply-side themes toward industrial policy, China restrictions, tariffs and family-centered economics. [S19-S22]	Matches post-2016 GOP emphasis on production and working-class voters.	Can be attacked as neither fully populist nor fully free-market.
Abortion / social policy	Long-standing socially conservative / pro-life identity; Catholic faith is central to biography.	Strong fit with evangelical and Catholic social-conservative voters.	General-election exposure among abortion-rights voters and suburban moderates.
Guns	Consistent Second Amendment orientation over Senate career.	Fits Republican primary electorate.	Potential vulnerability in suburban general-election markets after mass-shooting salience.
Education / family	Long-running emphasis on family, parental responsibility, skills and vocational pathways; common-good economics integrates family formation.	Can connect cost-of-living, education and cultural issues into a family-security frame.	If framed mainly as culture war, may crowd out economic persuasion.
Religion / culture	Catholic identity plus Cuban-exile anti-communist narrative.	Authentic bridge to faith voters and anti-authoritarian diaspora communities.	Religious identity alone does not create automatic Latino or evangelical transfer.

7. Foreign-Policy and National-Security Presidential Brand

7.1 Core brand: America First through state capacity, alliances, and deterrence

FACT The January 2025 America First directive instructed the Secretary of State to align policy, programs and personnel with the President's America First foreign policy. Rubio's Cabinet role therefore means his current record is an administration record, not merely a Senate platform. [S36]

INFERENCE Rubio's likely presidential synthesis is best described as "alliance-using America First": U.S. interests first, intense burden-sharing demands, economic security, deterrence and military strength, but continued use of NATO, Indo-Pacific partnerships and diplomatic institutions when they advance U.S. objectives. This is distinct from both pre-2016 liberal internationalism and a purely non-interventionist MAGA position.

7.2 Issue-by-issue foreign-policy brand

Theater	Current / established Rubio orientation	2028 brand opportunity	2028 vulnerability
China / Taiwan	Long-term China hawk; economic-security restrictions, export controls, industrial policy; current State diplomacy maintains U.S. Taiwan policy. [S21-S22, S37]	Most natural bridge between national security and working-class economics: supply chains, shipbuilding, semiconductors, fentanyl precursors, deterrence.	Business interests may resist decoupling-style measures; overmilitarized rhetoric could heighten war-risk concerns.
Russia / Ukraine	As Secretary, supports negotiated	Can argue that diplomacy from	MAGA non-interventionists may

	termination while operating through NATO and continuing alliance mechanisms. [S37]	strength and allied burden sharing are compatible with ending wars.	portray his Senate-era hawkishness as open-ended commitment.
NATO / Europe	Institutional experience and alliance use, with Trump-era burden-sharing pressure. [S37]	“Make allies carry more while preserving deterrence” can bridge factions.	Traditional allies may doubt predictability; isolationists may still see excessive commitment.
Israel / Gaza	Senior participant in administration Middle East diplomacy and reconstruction/peace architecture. [S38]	Direct executive-level experience in crisis bargaining.	Public fatigue with overseas commitments and humanitarian controversy can attach to Rubio.
Iran	Historically and currently hawkish; Reuters reported a clearer interventionist tone than Vance during the 2026 conflict. [S8]	Strongest “peace through strength” credential if outcomes appear favorable.	If conflict is prolonged/costly, Rubio becomes the most obvious target for anti-war Republicans and Democrats.
North Korea	Supports denuclearization and trilateral Japan-ROK-U.S. security coordination through State. [S37]	Reinforces alliance-management competence and China-linked deterrence narrative.	Limited domestic salience unless crisis emerges.
Cuba	Personal, ideological and policy continuity: anti-communist posture plus current State focus. [S17, S37]	Authentic connection to family story and Florida diaspora politics.	Cuba policy is not a proxy for the preferences of the national Latino electorate.
Venezuela	Long-term hard line on Maduro and external Russian/Chinese/Iranian influence. [S37]	Links Latin America to great-power competition and migration.	Intervention escalation can alienate restraint-oriented Republicans and Latinos opposed to military action.
Mexico / Latin America	Border, counternarcotics, migration, China influence and regional security are natural integration points.	Allows Rubio to make Western Hemisphere policy a first-order national-security portfolio.	Heavy security framing without legal-migration/economic components can narrow Latino appeal.

7.3 Selected Senate votes: why the record is more complex than a single label

Official vote	Rubio vote	What it establishes - and what it does not
2013 S. 744 comprehensive immigration bill	Yea	Confirms his central role in the Gang of Eight compromise. It remains a concrete primary vulnerability, even though his later border position hardened. [S40]
2022 Finland/Sweden NATO accession protocols	Yea	Consistent with alliance-oriented deterrence and an institutional NATO posture. [S42]
2024 final House amendment to H.R. 815 foreign-assistance package	Nay	Rubio and Vance both voted against this bundled measure. The vote complicates a simple “Rubio hawk / Vance restraint” caricature; differences are better assessed from the full record, rhetoric, priorities and executive behavior. [S41]

INFERENCE The selected votes show that Rubio’s record combines alliance support and hard-power credibility with case-specific limits on foreign-assistance legislation. A 2028 campaign could use this to resist a “blank-check interventionist” label, while opponents could still cite his broader rhetoric and executive role to argue that his threshold for coercive power is higher than Vance’s.

7.4 Rubio versus Vance on foreign policy - descriptive contrast

Reuters reporting during the 2026 Iran conflict captured a real intraparty contrast: Vance adopted a more cautious posture toward prolonged U.S. military involvement, while Rubio aligned closely with the administration’s hawkish execution. [S8] This is not a complete ideological binary - both operate inside the same administration - but it is the clearest current policy axis on which a 2028 contest could differentiate them.

Axis	Rubio evidence pattern	Vance evidence pattern	Potential primary cleavage
Use of force	More comfortable defending coercive military power and deterrence.	More explicitly skeptical of prolonged or open-ended U.S. involvement.	Outcome-dependent: successful limited action favors Rubio’s competence frame; costly stalemate favors restraint.

Alliances	Long institutional history with NATO and Indo-Pacific alliances.	More skeptical of European burden distribution and elite foreign-policy consensus.	Institutional reliability vs movement skepticism.
China	Very hard line combining military, technology and industrial policy.	Also China-focused but more embedded in economic-populist/non-interventionist coalition.	Differences are likely in sequencing and risk tolerance more than diagnosis.
Presidential brand	Experienced foreign-policy operator.	America First successor with stronger anti-establishment identity.	Readiness vs authenticity/continuity.

8. 2028 Republican Field and Rubio's Positioning Problem

As of August 2026 no major Republican has formally secured the 2028 nomination. Vance is the most obvious structural successor because he is vice president, has Trump's earlier "most likely" heir-apparent signal, and is already making national political and Iowa appearances. Rubio is the strongest alternative in current national trial heats, but publicly says he would support Vance if Vance runs. Other names discussed publicly include Ron DeSantis, Nikki Haley, Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, Donald Trump Jr., Tulsi Gabbard and others; their actual candidacies remain speculative. [S5, S9-S13, S39]

8.1 Five possible identities

Identity	When it is available	Evidence fit	Constraint
Trump's loyal successor	Trump directly endorses Rubio or Vance does not run	High if endorsement occurs: Cabinet and White House service validate loyalty.	Low if Trump endorses Vance; 2016 clips reappear.
Institutionalized heir to Trumpism	Trump neutral; Rubio runs on durable policy transformation rather than personality	Strong fit with industrial policy, border enforcement, China competition, family economics, executive competence.	Must prove this is not pre-Trump Republican restoration with new language.
More stable / presidential MAGA candidate	Primary voters want continuity but lower volatility	Fits "adult-in-the-room" meme and high-level governing portfolio. [S5]	Can sound like coded criticism of Trump and alienate core MAGA voters.
National-security conservative	Foreign crisis dominates 2027-28	Rubio's most differentiated credential.	Risk of "neocon" / endless-war frame, especially against Vance or Paul.
Next-generation Hispanic Republican leader	General-election expansion narrative; especially Florida/Southwest outreach	Biographical authenticity and bilingual capacity.	Latino voters are heterogeneous; identity transfer is limited and can look tokenistic if overemphasized.

INFERENCE The most internally coherent base case is a layered identity: institutionalized heir to Trump-era policy + executive competence + next-generation American Dream narrative. "Hispanic leader" works better as a supporting dimension than as the central theory of the campaign.

9. Republican Primary Coalition Segmentation

The following is a neutral constituency analysis: it describes Rubio's potential points of contact and constraints with publicly recognizable Republican voter blocs. It is not individualized political persuasion and does not imply that any group votes uniformly.

Group	Rubio competitiveness / fit	Likely issue emphasis	Core weakness / differentiation problem
MAGA core	Conditional: high only with credible Trump continuity signal	Border, China, anti-left cultural conflict, America First execution	2016 anti-Trump history; establishment/donor image; Vance's deeper movement identity.
Evangelical Christians	Moderate-to-strong potential fit	Family, abortion, religious liberty, education, anti-communism	Catholic identity is not itself evangelical validation; Vance also uses overt Christian rhetoric.
White working class	Mixed but improvable through post-2019 economics	Manufacturing, trade, energy, wages, border, China	Earlier elite/establishment image and donor ties; Vance biography and

			rhetoric are more directly identified with this bloc.
Non-college Republicans	Similar to white working class, with strong border/culture overlap	Cost of living, jobs, crime, immigration, anti-China industrial policy	Policy-heavy delivery can feel technocratic; 2016 scripted-image risk.
Suburban conservatives	Potentially strong comparative fit	Competence, taxes, schools, crime, national security, stability	Abortion and hardline immigration can limit crossover in general election.
Traditional Republicans	Strong natural affinity	Institutions, defense, business climate, alliances, fiscal concerns	Too much emphasis risks branding campaign as pre-Trump restoration.
Business-oriented conservatives	Strong donor and policy access	Taxes, competitiveness, regulation, AI, geopolitical stability	Tariffs, industrial policy and worker-first rhetoric create policy friction.
National-security voters	Very strong issue fit	China, defense industrial base, alliances, Iran, Latin America	Hawkishness becomes liability if voters prioritize restraint.
Cuban Americans	High biography and issue resonance, especially South Florida	Cuba, Venezuela, entrepreneurship, anti-authoritarianism, family	National Cuban-American preferences cannot be generalized to other Latino origins.
Puerto Ricans / other Latinos	Variable by place, origin, generation and class	Affordability, housing, jobs, healthcare, education, legal immigration; foreign policy varies by origin	Cuban identity has limited automatic transfer; hard enforcement can create backlash.
Young men	Rubio has digital/foreign-policy opportunity but Vance advantage is plausible	Jobs, technology, masculinity/service, podcasts, anti-China competition	Age/style and long establishment career may be less culturally native than Vance.
Catholics	Strong identity fit	Family economics, life issues, education, social solidarity	Latino and white Catholic electorates are politically diverse; identity is not determinative.
Veterans / military households	Strong experience fit	Readiness, deterrence, VA/benefits, defense industry, war termination	Intervention fatigue and casualty sensitivity can cut the other way.

10. Early-State Strategy: Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Carolina, Super Tuesday

FACT The Republican 2028 calendar was not finalized as of late July 2026. AP reported Republicans were expected to retain a traditional sequence led by Iowa and New Hampshire. The planning architecture below therefore treats Iowa-New Hampshire-Nevada-South Carolina-Super Tuesday as a scenario assumption, not a confirmed RNC schedule. [S31]

State / phase	Rubio objective	Coalition / message	Organization & media	Failure condition
Iowa	Finish in the top tier; ideally top two, while demonstrating evangelical and working-class viability	Faith/family + manufacturing/agriculture + China + border; minimize foreign-war abstraction	County chairs, caucus training, retail Q&A, evangelical validators, farm/manufacturing visits; low-cost digital plus local radio	Third/fourth with Vance dominating MAGA/evangelical vote and no offsetting suburban support.
New Hampshire	Convert competence into authentic retail politics; erase 2016 debate scar	Affordability + national security + anti-bureaucratic competence + generational change	Town halls, unscripted long-form Q&A, local TV/radio, veterans, independents/undeclared voters if rules permit	A debate or town-hall moment revives “robotic” frame; fifth-place-style collapse repeats.
Nevada	Demonstrate Latino and Western economic breadth	Housing, service-sector wages, small business, border/legal immigration, energy, China, public lands where relevant	Clark/Washoe field, bilingual outreach, hospitality workforce and small-business networks	Cuban-American biography is overused without Nevada-specific economic relevance.
South Carolina	Prove evangelical, military and Trump-coalition acceptability	Faith, military strength, border, China, family, administration record	Pastor/veteran networks, elected endorsements, TV and conservative media; direct contrast without personal attacks	Loses both MAGA core and traditional/national-security lane, leaving no consolidating bloc.
Super Tuesday	Translate viability into delegate accumulation and donor consolidation	National synthesis: work-family-security-strength	National TV/CTV, digital acquisition, surrogate network, rules-based delegate targeting	Early-state narrative remains “second place everywhere”; money migrates to leader.

Illustrative KPIs and decision gates

Stage	Illustrative KPI	Decision gate
Pre-Iowa	Within striking distance of top tier nationally; fundraising runway; complete early-state leadership teams	Enter only if there is a credible path that does not depend on Vance voluntarily collapsing.
Iowa	Top-two or roughly 20%+ range; donor retention; strong caucus-goer conversion	If weak third/fourth, decide whether NH path is genuinely independent of Iowa narrative.
New Hampshire	Top-two or clear upward trajectory; no major debate authenticity failure	If both IA and NH weak, avoid financing a vanity campaign.
SC/NV	At least one win or repeated top-two finishes plus endorsements	Need evidence of a distinct coalition before Super Tuesday.
Super Tuesday	Delegate pace sufficient to plausibly deny leader a rapid majority	If no consolidation lane, suspend rather than repeat 2016 attrition.

These KPI thresholds are scenario-planning heuristics, not predictions, poll targets, or normative recommendations to voters.

11. Hypothetical Message Architecture

The user requested message frames and possible slogans. The material below is presented as a neutral model of how Rubio's documented biography and policy record could be packaged if he ran; it is not an endorsement or a claim that these messages would be effective.

Frame	Core components	Illustrative slogan language	Strategic tension
1. American Dream Rebuilt	Cuban-immigrant family, bartender/maid parents, housing, wages, family formation, upward mobility	"The American Dream, Rebuilt."	Must show policies improve costs rather than rely on biography alone.
2. Production + Security	Manufacturing, shipbuilding, energy, semiconductors, China, tariffs, supply-chain resilience	"Made in America. Secure in America."	Tariff costs and corporate tensions require credible economic explanation.
3. Work, Family, Future	Common-good economics, child/family policy, education, skills, religion, community	"Work. Family. Security. Future."	Can be attacked from libertarian/free-market right and social-policy left.
4. Peace Through Strength - Limited Aims	Deterrence, alliances, defense industrial base, negotiated war termination, no open-ended missions	"Strength for a New American Century."	Rubio's hawkish history makes "limited aims" credibility contestable.
5. Secure Border, One American Future	Border enforcement, legal immigration, crime, assimilation, civic identity	"Secure Borders. Shared Future."	2013 immigration record and current enforcement politics create cross-pressure.

Narrative integration

A coherent Rubio narrative would connect seemingly separate issues through one causal chain: the American Dream requires a productive economy; a productive economy requires industrial capacity and secure supply chains; family stability requires affordable housing, wages and schools; public order requires border and crime control; and economic security requires preventing China or other adversaries from gaining leverage over critical industries. Foreign policy then becomes an extension of domestic capacity rather than a separate "world policeman" doctrine.

INFERENCE Rubio's strongest narrative asset is generational combination: he can present himself simultaneously as a product of late-20th-century upward mobility and as a policymaker arguing that the economic model that produced that mobility must be rebuilt for the 21st century.

12. Hispanic and Latino Voter Strategy as a Central Chapter

Latino Strategy: No Single “Latino Vote”

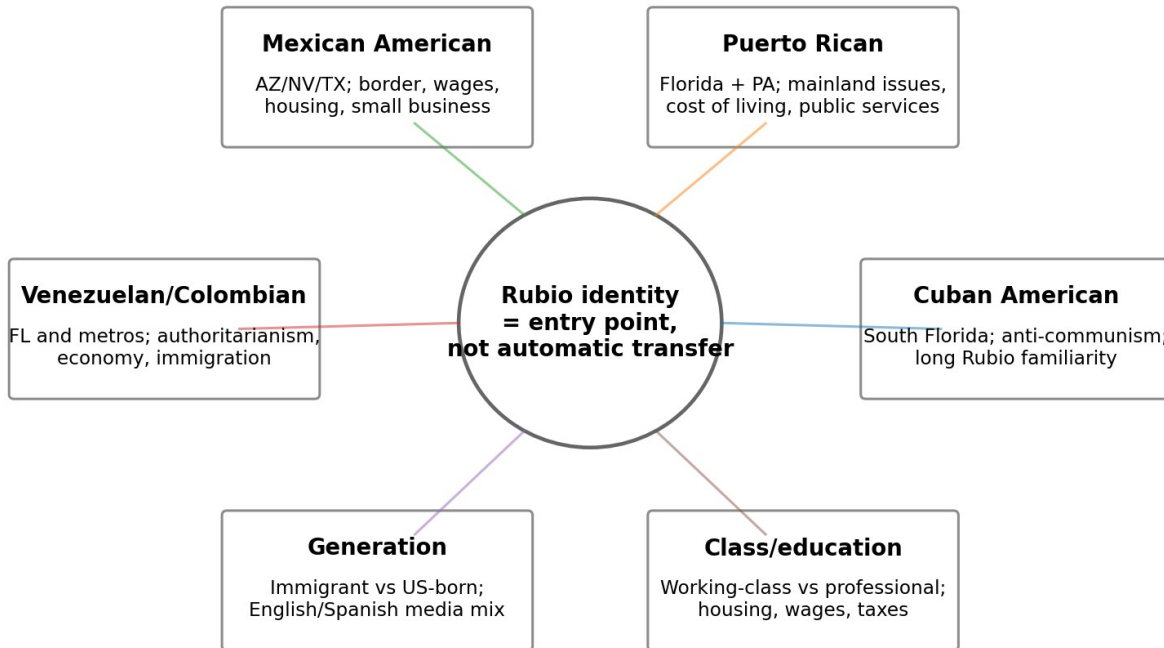


Figure 3. National-origin, region, generation, religion, class and education make “the Latino vote” an analytical shortcut, not a single electorate.

12.1 What changed in 2024 - and what did not

FACT Pew’s validated-voter study estimated Trump won 48% of Latino voters in 2024, up from 36% in 2020; AP VoteCast produced a lower estimate, illustrating measurement differences but also the same broad direction of Republican gains. [S25-S26]

FACT Those gains did not create a permanently Republican Latino electorate. By 2025-26, Pew and AP-NORC data showed meaningful deterioration in views of Trump among Latino adults, especially around cost of living and immigration enforcement. AP-NORC’s reported Hispanic subgroup had a relatively wide +/-6.9 point error range. [S26-S27]

INFERENCE The 2024 result should be treated as evidence of greater Latino electoral elasticity, not partisan capture. A Rubio campaign would have opportunity but also risk if it assumes descriptive representation automatically converts into votes.

12.2 Transferability of Rubio’s Cuban-American identity

Group / geography	Transferability	Potential connecting issues	Limits
Cuban Americans - South Florida	High relative to other groups	Anti-communism, Cuba/Venezuela policy, small business, Catholic/family identity, long Rubio familiarity	Generational change can weaken exile-politics salience.
Venezuelan / Colombian Americans - Florida and metros	Moderate-to-high in anti-authoritarian frames	Maduro, security, entrepreneurship, legal immigration	National-origin differences and U.S. domestic economic priorities remain decisive.
Mexican Americans - AZ/NV/TX/CA	Low automatic transfer; issue-based opportunity	Cost of living, housing, wages, border management, legal migration, small business, education	Cuba-focused rhetoric is peripheral; enforcement can create family/community backlash.
Puerto Ricans - FL/PA/Northeast	Low automatic transfer	Housing, healthcare, jobs,	U.S.-citizen status and

		education, disaster/governance issues, mainland cost of living	island/mainland issues differ fundamentally from Cuban exile politics.
Younger U.S.-born Latinos	Identity may matter less than economics/culture/media style	Housing, wages, education, entrepreneurship, digital culture	Candidate's heritage is not a substitute for contemporary economic performance.
Religious Latinos	Potential connection among Catholic/evangelical social conservatives	Family, education, abortion, religious liberty	Latino Catholics and evangelicals remain politically diverse.

12.3 State-specific implications

Arizona

Mexican-origin electorate, Maricopa growth, border politics and cost-of-living concerns make a Cuban-centered strategy insufficient. Rubio's best fit would be economic security + orderly border + legal immigration + housing, while distancing personal identity from any claim to represent all Latinos.

Nevada

Hospitality/service work, housing and cost pressures matter heavily. Spanish-language communications can help, but worker economics and local organization matter more than surname recognition.

Texas

Republican gains in South Texas create opportunity, but the state contains distinct border, suburban, energy and metropolitan Latino electorates. China/Mexico trade, energy, border capacity and entrepreneurship are stronger bridges than Cuba.

Florida

Rubio has the deepest institutional and cultural advantage: long statewide exposure, Cuban/Venezuelan communities, bilingual campaigning and a Republican-trending state environment. Florida is therefore a base-defense state rather than the main proof of national Latino transfer.

Pennsylvania

Puerto Rican communities in Philadelphia/Lehigh Valley require a different playbook: cost of living, work, education and healthcare outweigh Cuban-exile symbolism. The key question is marginal gains, not majority Latino support.

13. General-Election Electoral College Strategy

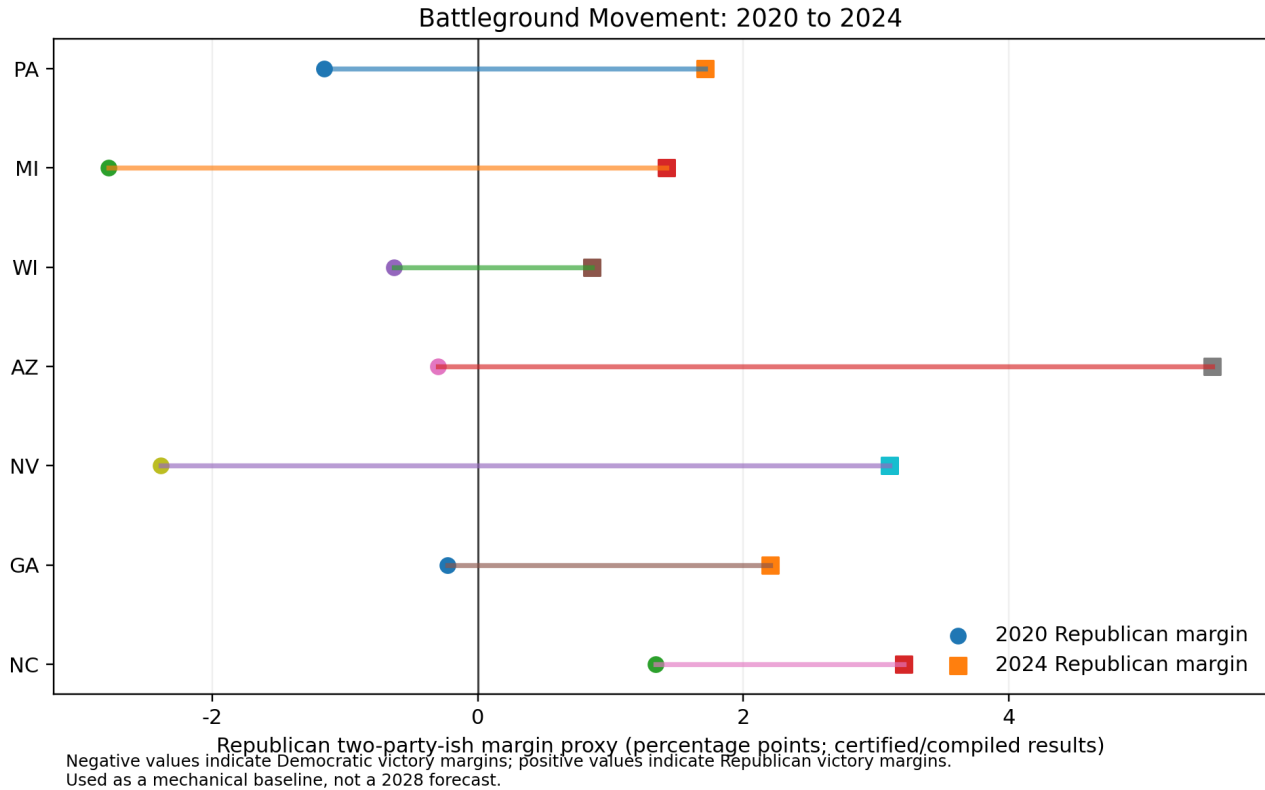


Figure 4. All seven core battlegrounds moved toward the Republican ticket between 2020 and 2024, but their margins remain structurally different.

FACT The 2024 Republican ticket won 312 electoral votes to 226. Under the current apportionment, Pennsylvania has 19 EV, Michigan 15, Wisconsin 10, Arizona 11, Nevada 6, Georgia 16, North Carolina 16, Florida 30 and Texas 40. [S28-S30]

Using the seven main 2024 battlegrounds as the variable set, the Republican 2024 map outside those states produced 219 electoral votes. That arithmetic makes several strategic points clear: a purely Sun Belt quartet of Arizona + Nevada + Georgia + North Carolina adds only 49, reaching 268; a purely Rust Belt trio of Pennsylvania + Michigan + Wisconsin adds 44, reaching 263. A Republican nominee normally needs at least one state from the other bloc unless the baseline map changes.

Electoral College Scenario Paths (2024 map as planning baseline)

Minimum path

Base 219	NC +16	GA +16	PA +19	= 270
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Sun Belt-centered

Base 219	NC +16	GA +16	AZ +11	NV +6	WI +10	= 278
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Rust Belt-centered

Base 219	PA +19	MI +15	WI +10	AZ +11	= 274
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2024 sweep

Base 219	All 7 battlegrounds +93	= 312
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Base 219 = Trump 2024 electoral votes excluding PA, MI, WI, AZ, NV, GA, NC. Paths are arithmetic scenarios, not predictions.

Figure 5. Mechanical paths to 270 using the 2024 map as a planning baseline.

13.1 Mechanical swing tolerance from 2024

State	2024 Republican margin	Approx. D-ward swing that would erase margin	Rubio coalition dependency
Wisconsin	R +0.86	0.86 pp	Non-college + suburban balance; turnout efficiency.
Michigan	R +1.42	1.42 pp	Working-class manufacturing + suburban moderation + Arab/Muslim and Black turnout dynamics.
Pennsylvania	R +1.71	1.71 pp	Non-college whites + Philly suburbs + Lehigh Valley/Puerto Rican margins.
Georgia	R +2.20	2.20 pp	Atlanta suburban retention + rural turnout + Black vote margin.
Nevada	R +3.10	3.10 pp	Clark County working-class/Latino margins + Washoe competitiveness.
North Carolina	R +3.21	3.21 pp	Rural base + fast-growing suburbs + Black turnout + college metros.
Arizona	R +5.53	5.53 pp	Maricopa suburban voters + Latino working-class support + border/economic salience.

The swing tolerance is a simple arithmetic benchmark, not a forecast. It asks how far each state could move toward Democrats relative to the 2024 presidential margin before changing sides, holding all else constant.

13.2 Four Electoral College scenarios

Scenario	Path	Political logic	Rubio-specific requirement
Minimum winning path	219 base + NC + GA + PA = 270	Protect two comparatively Republican-leaning southern battlegrounds and win the largest Rust Belt prize.	Maintain Trump-era non-college strength while recovering enough educated-suburban stability in PA.
Sun Belt-centered	219 + NC + GA + AZ + NV + WI = 278	Maximize Latino/Western and southern gains, then add the smallest Rust Belt state.	Cuban identity must translate into an economic rather than ethnic-national strategy; WI manufacturing message remains

			necessary.
Rust Belt-centered	219 + PA + MI + WI + AZ = 274	Rebuild working-class manufacturing coalition while adding the strongest 2024 GOP Sun Belt battleground.	Economic nationalism must be credible, not donor-coded; foreign policy cannot crowd out costs/jobs.
Landslide expansion	Hold all seven (312) and contest states such as MN, NH, VA, NM or NJ depending environment	Requires favorable national climate, Democratic weakness and coalition expansion beyond 2024 battlegrounds.	Rubio would need a substantial suburban/educated recovery without losing Trump's working-class gains.

13.3 Florida and Texas

Florida (30 EV) and Texas (40 EV) are structurally too large to treat as afterthoughts. Rubio's Florida history makes it a natural base state, but a serious campaign would still defend it because a loss would destroy any normal Republican path. Texas has become more competitive in some metropolitan areas even as the 2024 presidential result was strongly Republican; it remains the indispensable 40-vote anchor. These states are therefore "must hold" infrastructure states, not merely expansion targets.

14. General-Election Coalition and Democratic Opponent Scenarios

FACT The Democratic 2028 field is unsettled. Reuters has documented early activity by governors including Andy Beshear, Gavin Newsom, JB Pritzker and Josh Shapiro, while other nationally discussed figures include Pete Buttigieg, Kamala Harris, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others. Emerson's July 2026 trial heat had Buttigieg 19%, Newsom 17%, Jon Ossoff 13%, Ocasio-Cortez 13%, Harris 8%, Beshear 7%, Shapiro 5% and Pritzker 3%; these are extremely early preference measures, not nomination forecasts. [S11, S32-S33]

14.1 Baseline without a named Democratic nominee

Rubio advantage	Why it could matter	Rubio vulnerability	Why it could matter
Generational change	At 57 in 2028, Rubio could present a younger alternative to the Trump/Biden-era gerontocracy narrative.	Trump-administration ownership	If 2026-28 conditions are unpopular, Cabinet prominence becomes a liability.
Foreign-policy / security experience	Direct executive-level credential during multiple crises.	Hawkishness / war fatigue	A restraint-minded electorate may prefer less intervention.
Hispanic / immigrant-family biography	Potentially broadens the GOP's American Dream image.	Identity overreach	Latino groups are heterogeneous and recent GOP gains are reversible.
Senate + legislative experience	Policy depth, coalition with lawmakers, national network.	Long Washington record	Creates establishment/insider attack line.
Debating and interview skill	Can perform well in policy-heavy exchanges when flexible.	2016 "robotic" clip	Opponents will attempt to trigger repetition and authenticity doubts.

14.2 Head-to-head archetypes, not forecasts

Democratic archetype / currently discussed examples	Rubio's relative contrast	Rubio exposure
Executive-state contrast: Newsom, Shapiro, Beshear, Pritzker	Federal/national-security depth vs gubernatorial executive domestic record	Governors can blame Washington and Trump administration for national conditions.
Generational technocrat: Buttigieg	Both strong communicators with Cabinet experience; Rubio has deeper Senate/national-security tenure	Buttigieg can challenge 2016 baggage, social policy and Trump loyalty.
Populist / movement progressive: Ocasio-Cortez	Rubio can frame economic nationalism as non-socialist production strategy	AOC-style opposition can attack corporate donors and Rubio's class consistency.
Continuity / former national nominee: Harris	Rubio can emphasize generational reset and current executive portfolio	Harris can directly contest abortion, immigration enforcement and administration foreign policy.
Southern / Sun Belt senator: Ossoff if nationally viable	Rubio's experience vs younger southern generational profile	Georgia/suburban competition and anti-corruption messaging could neutralize age advantage.

Because the Democratic nomination is unresolved, these are contrast structures rather than claims that any named Democrat will be the nominee or that Rubio would defeat or lose to any of them.

15. Opposition Research, Attack Frames, and Defensive Logic

Likely attack frame	Evidence basis	Likely Rubio defense structure / counter-frame
"He said Trump was a con artist, then became his loyal subordinate."	2016 statements + current Cabinet service. [S17]	Acknowledge contested 2016 primary; emphasize voter verdict, subsequent governing experience, and policy outcomes rather than deny history.
"Marco is still the Gang of Eight amnesty senator."	2013 bill sponsorship. [S23-S24]	Differentiate 2013 conditions and current border-security framework; stress enforcement lessons and legal-immigration system. Vulnerability cannot be erased.
"Neocon / endless-war Republican."	Long hawkish Senate record and current Iran posture. [S8]	Define objectives, limits, burden sharing and war-termination criteria; show where diplomacy avoided escalation.
"Economic populism is a costume for a donor-class politician."	Historical donor ties + current common-good rhetoric. [S19, S34]	Point to pre-2028 industrial-policy record and concrete China/trade votes/proposals; disclose conflicts rather than overclaim anti-corporate identity.
"Anti-abortion, anti-gun-control extremist."	Long social-conservative and Second Amendment record.	Use federalism, family policy and constitutional framing; general-election difficulty remains in suburban states.
"Scripted Marco / Marcobot."	2016 Christie debate moment. [S18]	Long-form unscripted formats, direct answers, varied phrasing and specific examples are the only credible reputational rebuttal.
"He overpromises Latino appeal."	Cuban identity vs national-origin heterogeneity. [S25-S27]	Treat identity as biography, not entitlement to votes; lead with local economic issues and origin-specific validators.

16. Political Communication: Television, Conservative Media, Podcasts, and Digital

Channel	Primary function	Rubio strength / opportunity	Risk
Broadcast TV	Older voters, early-state persuasion, high-salience biography and contrast ads	Polished delivery and concise policy argument	Expensive; overproduced style can reinforce scripted image.
Fox News / conservative media	Primary legitimacy and rapid response	Experienced interview performer; current administration access	Host/audience skepticism of hawkishness or old-GOP identity.
Major podcasts	Long-form authenticity, younger men, ideological depth	Opportunity to explain industrial policy, faith, Cuba story, China and war limits	A less scripted environment can expose contradictions; Vance has strong cultural fit.
YouTube	Long interviews + searchable policy library + clip ecosystem	Policy depth compounds over time	Long-form content can be edited adversarially into clips.
X	Elite/media agenda, rapid response, memes	"Rubio Realizing" showed organic meme visibility. [S5]	Virality is uncontrollable; staff cannot manufacture authenticity on command.
TikTok / Instagram	Short-form discovery, younger/Latino audiences	Bilingual storytelling, behind-the-scenes governing clips	Policy nuance collapses; authenticity failures spread quickly.
Facebook	Older voters, local groups, community sharing	Florida/Latino/community networks	Lower youth reach; misinformation and group-context risks.
Streaming / CTV	Geographically precise persuasion at scale	Useful for early states and battleground media fragmentation	Measurement and frequency management are complex.
Email / SMS	Fundraising, events, volunteer activation	Can reactivate legacy lists if legally/operationally usable	List decay, deliverability, consent/compliance, donor fatigue.
Influencer networks	Third-party cultural validation	Can expand beyond formal GOP media ecosystem	Loss of message control and reputational risk from validators.

Digital principle: show adaptability rather than claim it

Rubio's 2016 reputational scar makes a digital strategy centered on flawless scripted clips counterproductive. The more credible content mix would feature unscripted Q&A, policy whiteboard explanations, travel/crisis-room context where legally appropriate, bilingual exchanges, and extended podcasts from which short clips can be extracted. The strategic goal is not to “look viral”; it is to generate enough authentic material that viral moments can arise without appearing manufactured.

17. Debate Strategy: Applying the 2016 Lessons

17.1 Defensive architecture

- Answer the question in the first sentence before pivoting to the broader frame; do not begin with a memorized bridge.
- Use a specific decision, vote, negotiation, or state-level example to prove command of facts.
- Vary language under repeated questioning. If an opponent accuses him of scripting, acknowledge the criticism and answer with a new example rather than repeating the same formulation.
- On Trump: treat 2016 as a contested primary, acknowledge the record, then move to years of subsequent governing cooperation. Do not pretend the rivalry never happened.
- On Iran/Ukraine: state the objective, limiting principle, burden-sharing rule, and termination condition. This structure is necessary to blunt “endless war” attacks.

17.2 One-on-one contrasts

Opponent type	Rubio contrast	Rubio must avoid
Vance	Experience managing alliances and crises; China/industrial policy continuity; “governing readiness”	Calling Vance unserious or disloyal to Trump; a personal attack could alienate the same voters Rubio needs.
DeSantis / governor	National-security and federal legislative/executive depth	Relitigating Florida rivalries or assuming statewide history guarantees national loyalty.
Haley / traditional internationalist	Trump-era governing trust plus tougher economic nationalism	Allowing race to become a contest for pre-Trump donor approval.
Paul / restraint candidate	Deterrence, allied leverage, defined national interests	Defaulting to generic “strength” slogans without explaining limits on force.
Populist outsider	Demonstrated results and executive responsibility	Technocratic dismissiveness; 2016 showed establishment validation is not enough.

INFERENCE The optimal tonal balance for Rubio is presidential composure with selective, evidence-based aggression. The 2016 lesson is not “never attack”; it is that attacks must arise from a coherent contrast and cannot force Rubio into an unnatural insult persona.

18. Campaign Finance & Organization

FACT Rubio had a powerful outside-money ecosystem in 2016: the FEC describes Conservative Solutions PAC as an independent-expenditure-only committee supporting his presidential campaign and records more than \$60 million in contributions and more than \$55 million in independent expenditures supporting Rubio or opposing rivals during that cycle. That is historical capacity, not evidence of a revived 2028 Super PAC. [S43]

18.1 Current financial baseline

Entity	2025-01-01 to 2026-06-30 public FEC summary	Interpretation
MARCO RUBIO FOR PRESIDENT (C00458844)	\$0 receipts; \$0 disbursements; \$3,609.89 ending cash; \$827,657.12 debts/loans owed by committee. [S14]	Legacy committee is not functioning as an active 2028 fundraising engine.
RECLAIM AMERICA PAC (C00500025)	\$116,630.87 receipts; \$47,304.66 disbursements; \$122,137.88 ending cash. [S15]	Active but small relative to presidential-scale infrastructure.
Current outside-donor signal	Axios: Ken Griffin expressed preference for Rubio over Vance; no formal public	Shows potential donor-class demand, not a financed campaign.

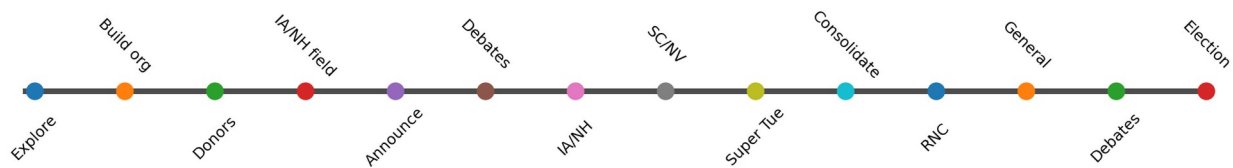
commitment established. [S34]

18.2 Funding coalition

A Rubio candidacy could plausibly draw from Florida finance, historical Republican major donors, national-security and business communities, Latino business networks, and traditional conservative donors. The harder question is small-dollar intensity. Vance's movement identity and vice-presidential platform offer a natural online donor base; Rubio would need organic digital energy and a concrete cause - not merely donor endorsements - to build comparable grassroots fundraising.

18.3 Organization sequence

Campaign Strategy Architecture: Phase Sequence



Decision gates intensify after early-state results: money, endorsements, delegate pace, and viability become binding constraints.

Figure 6. Phase sequence requested by the user; timing is contingent on the still-unresolved 2028 field and primary calendar.

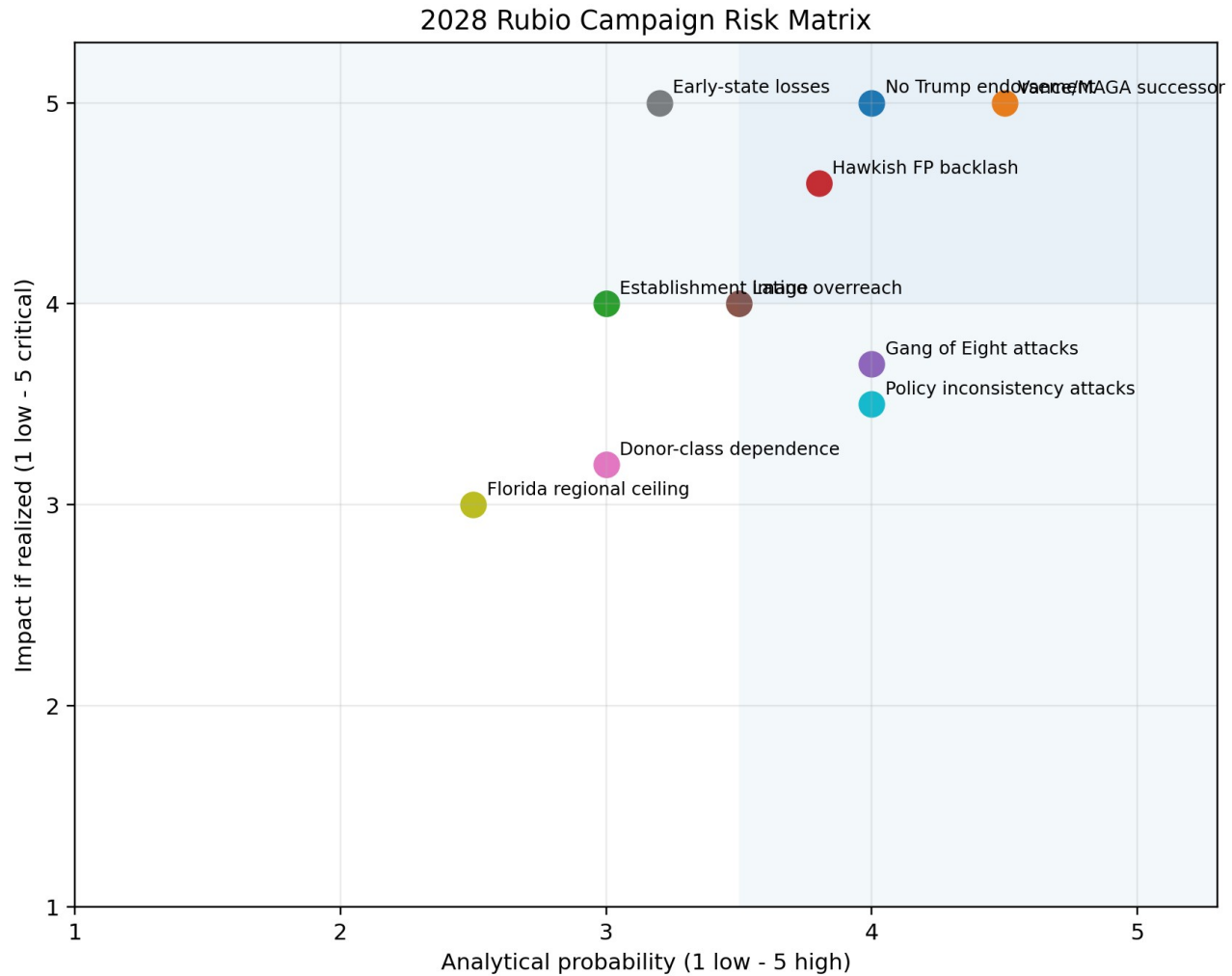
Phase	Core objective	Illustrative KPI	Failure condition / decision point
Exploratory phase	Determine whether a viable lane exists given Vance and Trump	Private polling, legal review, donor/endorser commitments, early-state recruiter availability	If Vance has Trump endorsement + Rubio pledge remains operative, entry may be incoherent.
Organization building	Compliance, data, finance, communications, research, ballot access, field leadership	Senior team filled; voter-file/data vendor; opposition-research book; crisis protocols	Staffing is donor-heavy but lacks field/MAGA credibility.
Donor consolidation	Secure runway without defining campaign as donor-class project	Mix of max-out donors, bundlers, Super PAC capacity, small-dollar acquisition tests	High burn with low grassroots conversion.
IA/NH field	Build county/town-level authenticity before launch	County chairs, caucus/primary volunteer depth, event attendance-to-support conversion	Late entry leaves no ground infrastructure.
Formal announcement	Define reason for running that is distinct from résumé	Message penetration and earned media; list growth; first 72-hour fundraising	Announcement reads as anti-Vance elite draft rather than voter-driven case.
Early debates	Prove flexibility and command; inoculate 2016	No repetition failure; favorable issue ownership; donor retention	A "Marcobot" revival could be existential.
Iowa/New Hampshire	Establish viability	Top-tier finish, delegate/media momentum	Two weak finishes narrow donor and endorsement pathways.
South Carolina/Nevada	Demonstrate coalition breadth	Evangelical/military and Latino/Western performance	Campaign lacks a state it can actually win.
Super Tuesday	Accumulate delegates and consolidate anti-/post-leader voters	Delegate pace + state wins + cash runway	Leader's delegate math becomes irreversible.
Candidate consolidation	Absorb endorsers, staff and donors from exits	Unified coalition and message discipline	Factional wounds persist; Trump remains hostile.
Republican National Convention	Unify party and select VP	Party favorability, fundraising surge, coordinated field	VP choice deepens factional split.
General election	Expand beyond primary without losing MAGA base	Battleground polling, registration, field contacts, fundraising, persuasion margins	Suburban recovery fails or working-class Trump vote falls off.
Presidential debates	Project command and contrast	No major gaffe; issue-specific trust gains	2016 scripting frame or foreign-policy overreach returns.
Election Day	Turnout + ballot operations + legal readiness	Targeted turnout benchmarks by state/county	Base erosion in any one of PA/MI/WI or AZ/NV/GA/NC combination breaks path.

19. Mandatory SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
1. Current Secretary of State + national-security coordinating authority.	1. Publicly stated deference to Vance undermines an immediate candidacy theory.
2. Deep Senate foreign-policy/intelligence experience.	2. 2016 home-state defeat and “robotic” debate memory.
3. Cuban-American working-class family / American Dream biography.	3. Gang of Eight immigration vulnerability in MAGA primary.
4. Long-standing China/economic-security agenda.	4. Hawkish foreign-policy record in a restraint-influenced GOP.
5. Economic-nationalist evolution documented before 2028.	5. Establishment/donor-class image can conflict with worker-populist message.
6. Bilingual communications and Florida network.	6. Policy shifts create consistency/opportunism attack surface.
7. Strong policy/interview skill and institutional relationships.	7. Cabinet role ties him to all Trump administration successes and failures.

Opportunities	Threats
1. Vance declines, stumbles, or lacks Trump endorsement.	1. Trump endorses Vance or another MAGA heir.
2. Foreign-policy crisis increases demand for experience.	2. Prolonged/unpopular overseas conflict makes Rubio the face of interventionism.
3. GOP seeks Trump-policy continuity with lower personal volatility.	3. MAGA base treats Rubio as an elite restoration candidate.
4. Latino electorate remains competitive and economically focused.	4. 2024 Latino gains reverse amid immigration enforcement/cost dissatisfaction.
5. China/industrial policy becomes the organizing national issue.	5. Tariffs/industrial policy generate price or corporate backlash.
6. Digital meme visibility softens old scripted image.	6. One debate clip can reactivate the 2016 authenticity frame instantly.
7. Democratic nominee creates suburban/national-security contrast favorable to Rubio.	7. 2026-28 macroeconomic conditions overwhelm candidate-specific strengths.

20. Risk Matrix



Scores are scenario-planning judgments based on current public evidence, not measured probabilities.

Figure 7. Analytical risk matrix; the 1-5 scale is qualitative scenario planning, not a statistical probability model.

Risk	Probability	Impact	Why it matters	Mitigation logic
Failure to secure Trump endorsement	Medium-high	Critical	Trump remains the dominant legitimating figure in the post-Trump succession question; Vance has structural advantage.	Rubio needs either neutrality, explicit blessing, or a changed circumstance that legitimizes entry.
Rise/strength of Vance or another MAGA successor	High	Critical	Vice-presidential office, movement fit, Iowa activity and current polling create a natural heir lane.	Rubio cannot out-MAGA a candidate with stronger movement identity; differentiation must be readiness + policy outcomes.
Establishment Republican image	Medium	High	Could reopen 2016 donor/endorsement dynamic without mass constituency.	Anchor economic nationalism in pre-2028 record and working-class policy specifics.
Hawkish foreign-policy image	Medium-high	High/Critical	Iran/Ukraine or another conflict can turn experience into liability.	Define limited objectives, burden sharing, diplomacy and termination conditions.
Past immigration-reform positions	High salience if attacked	High in primary	Gang of Eight is simple opposition research.	Acknowledge rather than evade; explain policy evolution and current framework.
Overestimating Latino representation value	Medium-high	High	Identity cannot substitute for origin-specific economic and immigration attitudes.	Use Cuban biography as story, not generalized voter entitlement.
Dependence on donor class	Medium	Medium-high	Can validate Vance/populist	Build small-dollar and

			critique.	volunteer evidence before donor-heavy launch imagery.
Early-state defeats	Medium	Critical	2016 shows how sequential momentum and donor confidence can collapse quickly.	Only enter with state-level organization and a defined state that can be won.
Florida regional limitation	Low-medium	Medium	Florida's current GOP lean and Cuban politics may not travel nationally.	Nationalize economic/industrial story; diversify validators.
Policy-consistency attacks	High	Medium-high	Trump, immigration, trade and corporate policy evolved materially.	Use timeline and principle-based explanation; distinguish learning from opportunism.

21. Five 2028 Scenarios

The ranges below are analytical scenario estimates, not objective predictive-model outputs and not voter recommendations. They are conditional on the specified scenario and therefore should not be compared as if they were independent poll probabilities.

Scenario	Trigger / core strategy	Main competitors	Required coalition	Nomination probability within scenario	General-election competitiveness if nominee
1. Trump-Endorsed Successor	Trump directly endorses Rubio, likely after Vance declines or loses standing. Rubio runs continuity + competence + America First institutionalization.	Any anti-endorsement challenger; DeSantis/Paul/other residual factions	MAGA core + evangelicals + traditional GOP + natsec + enough working class	55-75%	Broadly competitive; roughly toss-up-range national environment, but outcome depends on economy/war/nominee. Analytical range 45-55% conditional on nomination.
2. MAGA Coalition Competition	Trump neutral; Vance runs; both claim continuity. Rubio contrasts governing experience and alliance-based strength.	Vance first; potentially DeSantis/Paul/others	Suburban/traditional + natsec + older GOP + partial MAGA + Florida/Latino networks	20-35%	Competitive but primary may force hawkish/loyalty positions that hurt swing voters. Conditional range 43-53%.
3. Consensus Republican	Vance absent/weak; field fragmented; donors, elected officials and some MAGA voters seek a unifier.	DeSantis, Haley-type, Cruz, populist outsider	Broad "acceptable second choice" coalition across MAGA, traditional, evangelicals, business and security voters	40-60%	Potentially strong if nomination requires less intraparty bloodletting. Conditional range 46-56%.
4. Foreign-Policy President	Major external crisis makes diplomacy/war management central and Rubio's tenure is viewed favorably.	Vance/restraint candidate; any governor arguing domestic focus	Natsec + older GOP + suburban + institutional conservatives + crisis-minded MAGA	30-50%	Highly outcome-dependent: success can broaden readiness appeal; prolonged war can reverse it. Conditional range 42-55%.
5. Campaign Failure	Trump endorses Vance, Rubio enters anyway/late; donor-heavy launch; loses IA/NH; "robotic" or Gang of Eight frame dominates.	Vance or consolidated MAGA heir	No stable coalition; traditional donors without enough mass voters	0-10%	Generally not applicable because nomination unlikely; if forced, severely damaged intraparty unity would reduce competitiveness.

Marco Rubio's 2028 Presidential Campaign Strategy Architecture

Architecture node	Synthesis
Political Positioning	A governing heir rather than an outsider: America First policy institutionalized through executive competence, economic nationalism and national-security experience.

Trump Relationship	The gatekeeper variable. 2016 rivalry is survivable only because the current relationship is visibly high-trust; a Trump endorsement of someone else would sharply constrain Rubio.
Primary Coalition	Requires partial MAGA acceptance plus strong performance among traditional, suburban, national-security, faith, older Republican and selected Latino constituencies.
Message Architecture	American Dream rebuilt; productive national economy; work-family-security; secure border; peace through strength with defined limits.
Policy Platform	China-centered industrial strategy, border enforcement and legal-immigration reform, family economics, conservative social policy, alliance burden sharing, defense capacity and Western Hemisphere security.
Early-State Strategy	Under the provisional traditional GOP sequence: top-tier Iowa, authentic New Hampshire reset, coalition breadth in Nevada/South Carolina, delegate viability by Super Tuesday.
Fundraising & Organization	Current FEC activity does not show a national build. A real campaign would need rapid conversion of historical donor access into field capacity and small-dollar energy.
Media & Digital Strategy	Traditional interview competence plus long-form podcasts and unscripted digital material; avoid overproduced repetition that revives 2016.
Debate Strategy	Answer-first, evidence-specific, varied language; acknowledge 2016/Trump history directly; contrast Vance on readiness and foreign-policy risk tolerance without personal attacks.
Nomination Path	Most plausible if Vance does not run, Trump is neutral/supportive, or a crisis reorders demand. Hardest path is direct challenge to a Trump-endorsed Vance.
Electoral College Strategy	Protect 219-base arithmetic and combine at least one Rust Belt and one Sun Belt component; minimum illustrated path NC+GA+PA = 270.
General Election Coalition	Preserve Trump's non-college gains while recovering educated suburban margin; add Latino votes selectively through economics rather than identity alone.
Risk Management	Trump endorsement, war outcomes, Gang of Eight, authenticity, donor-class image, and early-state sequencing are the critical risks.
White House Path	A Rubio presidency is plausible only if governing credibility converts into a mass coalition without losing the working-class, anti-establishment voters who transformed the GOP after 2016.

Five Critical Conditions for Victory

1. A legitimate reason to run that is compatible with Rubio's public deference to Vance - ideally Vance's non-entry, Trump neutrality, or a direct Trump endorsement of Rubio.
2. Proof that economic nationalism is a durable Rubio conviction rather than a donor-class candidate borrowing MAGA language: industrial policy, China, manufacturing, housing and family economics must be integrated.
3. Early-state authenticity: no repeat of the 2016 scripting failure, and at least one early contest where Rubio demonstrates a real voter constituency rather than endorsements alone.
4. A foreign-policy doctrine that retains Rubio's experience advantage while defining limits, burden sharing and exit criteria strongly enough to survive anti-interventionist attacks.
5. A general-election coalition that keeps sufficient non-college/working-class Trump voters while improving among suburban and selected Latino voters in Pennsylvania, Arizona, Nevada and Georgia.

Five Fatal Vulnerabilities

1. Trump endorses Vance and Rubio nevertheless runs without a persuasive changed circumstance, turning the race into a loyalty referendum.
2. A prolonged or unpopular war makes Rubio synonymous with intervention while Vance or another rival owns restraint.
3. The campaign becomes visibly dependent on wealthy donors and traditional Republican validators before proving grassroots demand.
4. Opponents successfully merge the 2013 Gang of Eight record, 2016 anti-Trump rhetoric and later policy shifts into a single "no core convictions" narrative.
5. Rubio again underperforms in Iowa/New Hampshire and a debate or viral clip revives the "robotic" identity, cutting off money and endorsements before Super Tuesday.

Analytical probability ranges

SCENARIO Because the requested report is specifically about a Rubio campaign “if he runs,” the principal estimates are conditional on Rubio formally entering and remaining an active candidate through the opening contests. Based on current public information, an analytical range for winning the Republican nomination is approximately 25-40%. A corresponding conditional range for winning the presidency is approximately 12-22%. These are judgmental scenario estimates, not outputs from an objective predictive model.

INFERENCE An unconditional estimate as of 2026-08-18 would necessarily be lower because Rubio currently says he has no plans to run and would support Vance if Vance runs, while public FEC records do not show an active national presidential build. The candidacy decision itself is therefore a large source of uncertainty. [S5, S14-S15]

Appendix A. 2020-2024 Battleground Baseline

State	2020 result margin	2024 result margin	Approx. shift toward GOP	2028 EV
Pennsylvania	D +1.16	R +1.71	R +2.87	19
Michigan	D +2.78	R +1.42	R +4.20	15
Wisconsin	D +0.63	R +0.86	R +1.49	10
Arizona	D +0.30	R +5.53	R +5.83	11
Nevada	D +2.39	R +3.10	R +5.49	6
Georgia	D +0.23	R +2.20	R +2.43	16
North Carolina	R +1.34	R +3.21	R +1.87	16

Sources: National Archives and American Presidency Project, which links state source material; margins are rounded percentage-point summaries used for scenario planning. [S28-S30]

Appendix B. Evidence Checklist: Fact vs. Rumor

Claim	Status as of 2026-08-18	Evidence
Rubio is Secretary of State	FACT	State Department and White House. [S1-S2]
Rubio also holds the White House national-security adviser role	FACT	White House staff report / White House materials. [S3-S4]
Rubio is running for president in 2028	NOT ESTABLISHED	No announcement; current reporting says no plans and support for Vance if Vance runs. [S5]
Rubio is building a presidential FEC fundraising machine	NOT SUPPORTED BY LEGACY COMMITTEE DATA	Old presidential committee: zero receipts/disbursements in 2025 through June 2026. [S14]
Republican voters are considering Rubio	FACT, as polling snapshot	Emerson national and UNH New Hampshire polls show significant trial-heat support. [S10-S12]
Trump has endorsed Rubio for 2028	FALSE / NOT ESTABLISHED	Trump has publicly praised both and declined to choose in cited reporting. [S6-S8]
Ken Griffin has formally committed money to Rubio 2028	NOT ESTABLISHED	Axios reported a preference; spokesperson declined comment; no formal commitment stated. [S34]
The 2028 GOP calendar is finalized as IA-NH-NV-SC	NOT ESTABLISHED	AP said Republicans still needed to set their calendar, while expecting a traditional Iowa/NH start. [S31]

Appendix C. Source Notes and References

Primary sources and transparent polling are prioritized. News reporting is used mainly for candidacy statements, private political signals, donor activity and contemporary succession politics. URLs are provided for verification. Access date for web sources: 2026-08-18 unless otherwise stated.

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