

US presidential election 2024

Joe Biden's weak polling numbers spark alarm among Democrats

Party strategists and commentators trade barbs over whether US president should drop re-election bid



Recent polling has shown President Joe Biden trailing Donald Trump in election battleground states just a year ahead of the 2024 election © Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

James Politi in Washington 8 HOURS AGO

Democratic strategists are clashing over Joe Biden's dropping poll numbers and his ability to win re-election in a potential rematch against Donald Trump next year despite the mounting legal troubles facing the former president.

The fretting about [Biden](#) comes as voters head to the polls on Tuesday in a series of local and statewide elections in Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania that will be important bellwethers heading into 2024 — and may send a signal about the president's popularity.

Republican victories in crucial races would likely amplify concerns about Biden's 2024 chances, while strong Democratic performances could ease them.

Over the weekend, David Axelrod, who was a political strategist for former president Barack Obama, sounded alarm bells over Biden's electability and suggested that he should consider dropping his campaign for a second term.

“The stakes of miscalculation here are too dramatic to ignore. Only Joe Biden can make this decision,” Axelrod posted on X, formerly Twitter. His comments were prompted by a New York Times/Siena poll of critical battleground states that showed [Trump beating Biden](#) in five of six of them in a potential match-up.

But many [Democrats](#) are pushing back against pessimism about Biden. “Polls are famously bad this early,” Jim Messina, who was also a senior campaign strategist for Obama, told the Financial Times.

“It’s going to be a choice between two candidates a year from now and they need to win with voters turning out in November 2024. Not to people who reply to polls in November 2023.”

Several Democrats said Axelrod’s suggestion that Biden might bow out was unrealistic, and the Chicago political operative had been wrong before about Biden, dismissing his chances of winning four years ago.

“Man who called Biden ‘Mr Magoo’ in Aug 2019 is still at it,” Ron Klain, Biden’s former White House chief of staff, shot back at Axelrod on X, referring to an elderly, stubborn cartoon character with vision problems.

Nevertheless, recent polls have exposed troubling weaknesses for Biden. Voters remain very concerned about his age — he will turn 81 on November 20 — and rate him below Trump on a variety of issues, including his handling of the economy.

Meanwhile, there have been signs that Biden is losing support among important parts of the party’s base, particularly among black and Hispanic voters.

“Yellow lights are flashing. Most troubling thing: it’s not a one-off; it’s part of a trend,” warned Anthony Coley, a former senior justice department official under Biden, in a post on X, urging his party to “not automatically dismiss the poll and the fallout as typical Democratic bedwetting”.

Biden’s weak polling numbers have coincided with a [rift in the Democratic party](#) over his handling of the Middle East crisis, with progressives accusing him of backing Israel too stridently in its war against Hamas and not doing enough to limit civilian casualties.

In a podcast with former staffers, Obama took a more neutral stance on the war. “If you want to solve the problem you have to take in the whole truth and you have to admit that nobody’s hands are clean,” he said.

Mary Anne Marsh, a Democratic strategist based in Massachusetts, said Biden retained a lead on abortion, which would drive voters to the polls.

“For women in particular who know that abortion rights are being taken away from them, the other issues don’t matter. What good is the economy, if you don’t have the

right to get the healthcare you need?”

The state and local races being watched most closely for signs of the political mood are the Kentucky governor's contest, pitting incumbent Democrat Andy Beshear against a Republican challenger, as well as the Virginia legislature elections and a ballot measure on abortion in Ohio.

Democrats hope that the contrast with Trump, which served Biden well in 2020, will become even more vivid next year.

“President Biden's campaign is hard at work reaching and mobilising our diverse, winning coalition of voters one year out on the choice between our winning, popular agenda and MAGA Republicans' unpopular extremism,” said Kevin Munoz, a spokesperson for Biden's campaign, referring to the latest polls.

Matt Bennett, a former adviser to Bill Clinton now at Third Way, a think-tank, said: “Joe Biden has lived in their lives for the past three years and Trump hasn't for most people. By the time they vote Trump will be back in their lives in a big way.”

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