

Opinion **US presidential election 2024**

## Republicans are delighted with Biden

Democrats appear on the back foot as Trump's party eyes control of Congress as well as the White House

**EDWARD LUCE**



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**Edward Luce** 14 HOURS AGO

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It could hardly be better scripted. Having survived an assassination attempt, a conspicuously bandaged Donald Trump is now spreading benediction among the Republican faithful in Milwaukee.

Some in his party detected the protective hand of God in Trump's last-second head movement on Saturday. Providence saved him from the bullet. The good Lord has also blessed him with a visibly waning opponent. Joe Biden is fond of saying: "Don't compare me to the almighty. Compare me to the alternative." To many Republicans, there does not seem to be much of a difference.

If [the US election](#) were held now, Trump would probably win. It is hard to see how that will dramatically change for Biden in the next 15 weeks. The problem is not with his party. On Tuesday, a new poll showed Biden trailing Trump by three points in Virginia — a state that until a few weeks ago was considered safely Democratic. Yet in the Virginia Senate race, the sitting Democratic candidate Tim Kaine has an 11-point lead over his Republican challenger. A similar gap is replicated in many races across the country.

The problem is with Biden. Since he will be on top of his party's ticket in November, he could drag the rest of it down. A Trump presidency would be one thing. A [unified Republican Washington under Trump](#) would be another altogether.

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Biden and his defenders have taken to blaming the conventional media for constantly raising his age since last month's painful debate. This is mostly a red herring. Voters seem to have been way ahead of the media in that regard. Most of them do not read the New York Times or watch MSNBC in any case. Nor is the media guilty, as Team Biden claims, of letting Trump off the hook. On Monday Biden complained in a halting network interview that journalists were ignoring Trump's lies. It is fair to say that Trump's serial dishonesty is among the most chronicled sagas in modern history. That is as it should be. But Trump's well-known deficiencies only sharpen the urgency of addressing Biden's.

The obvious step would still be for Biden to step down. His campaign is instead battering down the hatches. It is also hurriedly [bringing forward the delegate vote](#) to affirm him as the nominee. This would sew up his formal nomination three weeks before the party's convention in Chicago. Far from ending the debate over his age, the move smacks of panic. It also belies the Biden campaign's claim that there would not be enough time to find a replacement. If that were true, why the hurry to foreclose the remaining time?

America now has a split screen of two parties. One, in Milwaukee, is marching in unison behind its leader and his Trumpian running mate, [Senator JD Vance of Ohio](#). There is a confidence to the Republican convention that resembles a will to power. There is no internal dissent. The never-Trumpers have long since left the party.

The other party, Biden's, continues to say one thing in public and another in private. Democrats are wishing the ends but not willing the means. There are many fence-sitting figures who are waiting for something to happen. Maybe Biden will suddenly acquire a new energy. Or perhaps he will stumble so badly that he will have no choice but to quit. It is likelier that his lacklustre campaign will continue along the same trajectory without a forcing event.

The US presidential election is thus turning into a contest between single-mindedness and dutiful resignation. Major Democratic donors are diverting their money to down-ballot races to try to save the Senate and the House of Representatives from going Republican. That is unlikely to work. The law of hydraulics says that the person at the top of the ticket brings everyone up or down.

It is also increasingly hard for Biden personally to make the case that Trump is a threat to US democracy. Trump is indeed a menace. He has just selected a running mate who said he would have supported Trump's efforts to reverse the electoral

college vote in January 2021. Vance, in other words, is vowing to be everything Mike Pence was not. But Biden has had to tone down his warnings about Trump for fear of being accused of inciting another assassination attempt. On Monday he distanced himself from having called Trump an “existential” risk to the republic.

That is not a campaign-winning line. If indeed democracy is on the ballot in November, then why are Democrats behaving as though it is not? Some of it is down to lack of courage. Few want to take the risk of being labelled a traitor to their leader. If they ejected Biden and Trump still won in November, history could lay the blame on them.

There is also uncertainty about what would happen after Biden. The obvious replacement, [vice-president Kamala Harris](#), is still unproven as a candidate. Other potential nominees would be afraid to enter the contest for fear of being accused of blocking the path of America’s first female non-white potential president.

The net result is likely to be more of the same. If you judge politicians by what they do, not what they say, Democrats have already made their choice. They prefer a probable loss to the risk of winning.

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