

# [***Biden and Trump are poised for a potential rematch that could shake American politics***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B11-9N91-DYMD-62CC-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

January 2, 2024 Tuesday 11:39 AM GMT

Copyright 2024 Associated Press All Rights Reserved

**Section:** POLITICAL NEWS

**Length:** 1519 words

**Byline:** STEVE PEOPLES, AP National Political Writer

**Dateline:** LACONIA, N.H.

**Body**

LACONIA, N.H. — U.S. presidential elections have been rocked in recent years by economic disaster, stunning gaffes, secret video and a pandemic. But for all the tumult that defined those campaigns, the volatility surrounding [*this year's presidential contest*](https://apnews.com/hub/election-2024) has few modern parallels, posing profound challenges to the future of American democracy.

Not since the Supreme Court effectively decided the 2000 campaign in favor of Republican [*George W. Bush*](https://apnews.com/hub/george-w-bush) has the judiciary been so intertwined with presidential ***politics***.

In the coming weeks, the high court is expected to [*weigh whether states can ban*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-insurrection-14th-amendment-colorado-maine-5e211f4078974f8c87dd915893241fb4) former President [*Donald Trump*](https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump) from the ballot for his role in leading the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Meanwhile, a federal appeals court is weighing Trump's argument that he's immune from prosecution.

The maneuvers are unfolding as prosecutors from New York to Washington and Atlanta move forward with 91 indictments across [*four criminal cases*](https://projects.apnews.com/features/2023/trump-investigations-civil-criminal-tracker/index.html) involving everything from Trump's part in the insurrection to his efforts to overturn the 2020 election and his hush money paid to a porn actress.

Depending on how Trump's appeals play out, he could be due in court as early as March 4, the day before Super Tuesday, raising the unprecedented prospect that he could close in on the GOP nomination from a courtroom.

On the Democratic side, President [*Joe Biden*](https://apnews.com/hub/joe-biden) is seeking reelection as the [*high inflation*](https://apnews.com/hub/inflation) that defined much of his first term appears to be easing. But that has done little to assuage restless voters or ease widespread concerns in both parties that, at 81, he's simply too old for the job.

And at least three serious candidates who have launched outsider presidential bids threaten to scramble the campaign and eat into the support from independent voters who were critical to Biden's success in 2020.

Facing such uncertainty, few expect the traditional rules of ***politics*** to apply in 2024. Jim Messina, who managed former President [*Barack Obama’s*](https://apnews.com/hub/barack-obama) reelection, said Trump could very well defeat Biden in the fall, even if the former president is in prison.

“We just don’t know,” Messina said. “Everyone in the world knows, especially me, that this election is going to be really, really close.”

**Implications for abortion, immigration and U.S. role in the world**

The results will have long-term implications on everything from the future of [*abortion rights*](https://apnews.com/hub/abortion) and [*immigration policy*](https://apnews.com/hub/immigration) to the role of the U.S. in the world. A Trump victory would raise the possibility of the U.S. largely abandoning [*Ukraine*](https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine) as it seeks to repel Russia's invasion. Domestic ***politics*** could also test Biden's [*commitment to Israel,*](https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war) a policy that threatens to erode his standing with young voters and people of color who are critical elements of his coalition.

One of the few certainties at this point is that Biden is a virtual lock to be the Democratic nominee again, facing only token opposition in this year's primary despite overwhelming concerns within his own party about his physical and mental fitness. And though a few rivals are fighting furiously to stop Trump, he is well positioned to win the GOP nomination for the third consecutive election.

The strength of the GOP opposition to Trump will become more clear on Jan. 15 when the Iowa caucuses launch the nomination process. Trump holds a [*commanding lead*](https://apnews.com/article/iowa-caucuses-republicans-election-d3aad4bf7d2f1a83159f3523df94313e) in most national polls, although former U.N. ambassador [*Nikki Haley*](https://apnews.com/hub/nikki-haley) and Florida Gov. [*Ron DeSantis*](https://apnews.com/hub/ron-desantis) are fighting to stop him.

That hasn't been easy, however, as DeSantis has struggled to connect with voters and has embraced culture war topics that often left him competing for the same base of support as Trump. And Haley's pitch as a more sensible, moderate candidate was threatened last week when she was pressed on the cause of the Civil War and [*didn't mention slavery*](https://apnews.com/article/haley-election-civil-war-slavery-a509ff9d7cc5e271c42592276b75735c).

Allies of DeSantis and Haley privately concede that their best chance to wrestle the nomination away from Trump would come in a long-shot push for a contested convention in Wisconsin in July.

Many leaders in both parties are already convinced that Trump will be the GOP nominee. More than 90 House Republicans, 18 senators and seven governors have endorsed Trump. Haley and DeSantis have secured the endorsements of just six House Republicans, no senators and two governors combined.

“This will be one of the earliest primaries wrapped up in my lifetime,” Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., who endorsed Trump back in November 2022, said in an interview. “I'm already focused on the general election. ... There is going to be a political earthquake next November.”

**Biden vs. Trump**

Public polling strongly suggests that voters do not want a rematch between Trump and Biden.

Most U.S. adults overall (56%) would be “very” or “somewhat” dissatisfied with Biden as the Democratic presidential nominee in 2024, according to [*a poll*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-trump-2024-campaign-democrats-republicans-440088966619e68dbf89f745788bb372) conducted last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. A similar majority (58%) said they would be very or somewhat dissatisfied with Trump as the GOP’s pick.

Perhaps because of such apathy, some voters simply don’t believe Biden and Trump will end up on the general election ballot, despite strong evidence to the contrary. That's an idea that conservative strategist Sarah Longwell, who founded the Republican Accountability Project, says she hears regularly during weekly focus groups with voters across the political spectrum.

“Voters really aren't thinking about it, so they don't see the thing that's coming right at us — the most likely scenario, which is Trump vs. Biden,” Longwell said. “But Trump is so dangerous. ... I wish the level of urgency from everybody matched the reality of where we are headed.”

**Threats to democracy**

While concerns about Biden are centered on his age, Trump has increasingly embraced authoritarian messages that serve as clear warnings of his plans to dismantle democratic norms if he returns to the White House.

Echoing strongmen leaders throughout history, Trump has framed his campaign as one of retribution and has spoken openly about using the power of government to pursue his political enemies. He has repeatedly [*harnessed rhetoric*](https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-immigration-iowa-dff7f632948fa6511fb7d1955a28610c) once used by Adolf Hitler to argue that immigrants entering the U.S. illegally are “poisoning the blood of our country.” He said on Fox News last month that he would not be a dictator “ [*except for day one.*](https://apnews.com/article/trump-hannity-dictator-authoritarian-presidential-election-f27e7e9d7c13fabbe3ae7dd7f1235c72) ” And he shared a word cloud last week to his social media account highlighting words like, “revenge,” “power” and “dictatorship.”

Biden, like his party more broadly, has leaned into concerns about the future of democracy should Trump return to the White House, but that has done little to improve his standing. Early polls reveal weakness among core segments of his coalition, including voters of color and young people.

People on Biden's team do not fear that his base will defect to Trump in the general election, but they privately worry some of the Democratic president's supporters may not vote at all. They're betting that Biden's achievements, which include landmark legislation on gun control, climate change and infrastructure, will eventually help overcome pervasive concerns about his age.

Ultimately, however, Biden's campaign believes that voters will rally behind the president once they fully understand that Trump could realistically return to the White House.

**‘This election will be a choice’**

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, who sits on Biden's advisory council, said the president's reelection campaign “knows it can't take any vote for granted," which is why the campaign has already invested heavily in efforts to mobilize Biden's diverse coalition.

"This election will be a choice — a choice between a president who has delivered historic results for the American people and someone who poses an existential threat to our democracy and freedoms," Dickens said. “We will win in November once we fully make the case, explain the stakes and make the choice clear.”

Meanwhile, there is a sense of deep uncertainty on the ground in Iowa and New Hampshire, where Republican presidential candidates in particular have been showering primary voters with attention for much of the last year.

Rodney Martell, a 65-year-old Republican from Loudon, New Hampshire, said he's ready for the voting to begin. He's supporting Haley's primary bid, but said he'd support Trump in the general election if he had no other choice — even if Trump is a convicted felon.

Martell said he doubts the 2024 election will ultimately be a rematch of Trump and Biden, however: “Honestly, if it comes to that kind of race again, I think it could get pretty ugly."

More than 1,000 miles to the west, Susie Fortuna offered a similar assessment during a recent Haley campaign event in Coralville, Iowa. Fortuna lives in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, but she was in Iowa to visit family.

She isn't convinced that Biden and Trump will emerge as their party's nominees, either. The political year ahead, she said, feels “unsettling."

“I feel like there are things out there that we don’t know yet, to be honest,” Fortuna said.

\_\_\_

Associated Press writers Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire, and Hannah Fingerhut in Davenport, Iowa, contributed to this report.

**Load-Date:** January 2, 2024

**End of Document**