

# [***Trump's events aren't drawing big protests this year. Instead, Biden is facing public ire***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BPR-14J1-JC5B-G4KH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** JILL COLVIN and WILL WEISSERT, Associated Press

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**Body**

NEW YORK — When [*Donald Trump*](https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump) first ran for the White House [*eight years ago*](https://apnews.com/hub/campaign-2016), protesters filled the streets.

His inflammatory rhetoric and often dehumanizing descriptions of immigrants spurred thousands to demonstrate outside his rallies. By this time in 2016, protesters regularly interrupted his speeches, sparking clashes and foreshadowing Trump's habit of encouraging violence against those he casts as his enemies.

“Knock the crap out of them, would you?” Trump once said as he egged on the crowd to go after protestors on their own — even promising to pay their legal bills.

No longer.

As he runs again with an agenda that is arguably more extreme than his two previous campaigns, mass protests at Trump rallies and appearances are a thing of the past. When Trump returned to New York last week for a hearing in one of his criminal cases, just a smattering of detractors turned up outside the courthouse. During a Midwestern swing Tuesday, Trump was interrupted briefly by a protest in Green Bay, but otherwise encountered minimal opposition.

In a twist, it's now [*President Joe Biden*](https://apnews.com/hub/joe-biden) who is facing a sustained protest movement, largely by those furious over the administration's support for Israel in its war against Hamas. During his [*first major rally*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-harris-abortion-virginia-2024-rally-32acf43a2f89ff539d9864617e9857cc) of the year, Biden’s 22-minute speech was interrupted no less than a dozen times by detractors calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. Protesters repeatedly disrupted [*his celebrity fundraiser*](https://apnews.com/article/democrats-election-2024-fundraiser-new-york-ebfbc81d3b70f38745ae00c7ce6a382d) last week with former presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at New York’s Radio City Music Hall, as hundreds more demonstrated outside.

Nearly a decade after Trump launched his first campaign, organizers and others who participated in past protests describe a change in tactics as they focus their efforts on other issues or turning out voters in November. Some described a “Trump fatigue” after nearly a decade of outrage. Others say it’s Biden’s policy toward Israel that has them the most agitated and have turned their attention to protesting him.

“All the people that would be protesting Trump, a lot of these people, a lot of that energy are now focused on protesting a genocide in Gaza," said Thomas Kennedy, an immigrant from Argentina who participated in more than a dozen anti-Trump protests and rallies in 2016.

Kennedy still describes the former president as a “horrible threat.” But for “a lot of people like me who would have been out there protesting Trump, it's just demoralizing and dispiriting. It's not worth my effort and my energy.”

**Warning sign**

That's a potential warning sign for Biden, whose campaign aims to energize its base by casting Trump as a threat and framing the election as a historic test of the nation's commitment to democracy.

"President Biden believes in the constitutional right of making your voice heard and treats protestors with respect and empathy — unlike Donald Trump,” said Biden campaign spokesman Ammar Moussa.

Biden campaign officials note that protest intensity hasn't correlated with recent election outcomes. Trump won in 2016 despite the fierce resistance, and President Obama won despite demonstrations in 2012. They also point to Democratic wins in recent elections, including the 2022 midterms.

Some who organized protests against Trump in the past say the more muted approach this year is part of a deliberate effort to not elevate his comments and ideas.

Strongmen ”need an audience and they need gas and wind in their sails,” said Rachel O’Leary Carmona, executive director of Women’s March, a group that began as a worldwide demonstration against Trump’s inauguration in 2017. “The best thing that people can do to combat Trump in many ways is not to give him a platform and gas."

It’s a perspective, she said, that took hold during the 2020 campaign at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when many activist groups opposing Trump decided to “stand down." Instead, demonstrations turned to broader demands for racial justice following George Floyd's killing by police.

Annette Magnus, the former executive director of Battle Born Progress, a Nevada group that helped organize anti-Trump protests during the 2016 election, also described a strategic change.

“People are very focused on turnout and going door-to-door and talking to voters, because that’s what’s going to matter,” she said. “I will do everything I can to make sure he is never elected again. It’s just going to look different because it’s a different election year and so much has happened since then.”

There are also safety concerns, with some organizers concluding that demonstrating against Trump isn't worth the potential physical risk.

**Trump protests**

Trump has encountered occasional protests at his events this year. In early-voting Iowa and New Hampshire, a small group of environmental activists interrupted all the major candidates, including Trump. But his response underscored how much things had changed.

“It’s amazing 'cause that used to happen all of the time. And I don’t think it’s happened in two-and-a-half or three years,” he remarked after an interruption in Indianola. “It always adds excitement."

That “excitement” included assaults and arrests, as well as frequent [*scenes of protesters clashing with supporters*](https://www.cbsnews.com/video/police-arrest-protesters-at-donald-trump-rally-in-california/) as well as riot police.

In March 2016, Trump was forced to [*cancel*](https://apnews.com/general-news-events-united-states-presidential-election-17787a327ac849c1b7d0f0cfc4463ca6) a rally in Chicago after raucous [*protesters packed the arena*](https://apnews.com/united-states-presidential-election-events-0686df3d4c0349b2a58fdb6e4e337f7a) where he was set to speak. A day later, in Ohio, a man leaped over a barrier and rushed Trump's stage. U.S. Secret Service mobilized to surround the candidate in a protective ring.

Trump routinely responded to the protesters with mockery and insults, telling them to “Go home to mommy,” or instructing security to “Get 'em out!” as his crowds erupted into chants of “Trump! Trump! Trump!”

Eventually, organizers began playing an announcement ahead of his rallies with instructions for the crowd.

“If a protest starts near you, please do not in anyway touch or harm a protester," said one version. Instead, they were told to notify law enforcement by holding up rally signs and chanting Trump's name.

This time it's Biden who is having to adjust to endless disruptions. Unlike Trump, the incumbent president has tried to defuse confrontations. During a recent event in Raleigh, North Carolina, promoting the administration’s health care policies, Biden urged the crowd to, “Be patient” with those shouting concerns about Gaza.

“They have a point. We need to get a lot more care into Gaza,” he said, drawing strong applause.

That was a very different reception from the one that awaited Paula Muñoz, who was a student at Nova Southeastern University in Florida in October 2015 when she and several friends decided to organize what was one of the early disruptions of a Trump event.

About a dozen activists — including her future husband — RSVP'd for the rally at Trump’s Doral golf club — and divided themselves into three groups, planning to stagger their outbursts in 20-minute intervals.

“Our goal was to interrupt, to badger the whole speech," she said, “to try to ruin his event, basically.”

The event would provide a taste of the violence to come. One of the protesters was forcefully dragged by the collar of his shirt and [*pulled to the ground*](https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/trump-protester/62047/); another was kicked.

**‘We’re exhausted'**

Muñoz is no longer focused on Trump. Now the executive director of the Florida Student Power Network, Muñoz spends her time on local issues, including an abortion amendment that will be on the ballot in November.

“We’re exhausted,” she said, expressing frustrations over “the two party system in general.” National ***politics***, she said, “feels almost as a distraction” when people are struggling to pay their rent.

While she said she fears the prospect of another Trump administration, she said she is deeply disappointed by Biden.

“We’re tired of having to pick the less of the two evils," she said. “That’s part of the thing I think people feel burned out about. It's just like complete disappointment on end.”

Marta Popadiak, director of movement ***politics*** for People’s Action, a progressive activist organization, said the group is focused on voter turnout but hasn’t ruled out organizing protests this summer at the GOP convention.

“We are super laser-focused on doing our persuasion program and getting ready to defeat (Trump) in 2024.”

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Weissert reported from Washington.

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