

# [***This is 2024's new political normal six months from the election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYN-GPM1-DY7V-G00B-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

May 6, 2024 Monday 4:00 AM GMT

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**Length:** 1467 words

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**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Donald Trump, the Republican presumptive nominee who just falsely accused his opponents of [*running a "Gestapo" administration*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/04/politics/trump-democrats-gestapo-rnc-retreat/index.html), will be back in a New York courtroom on Monday at his criminal trial - the first of an ex-president in history.

The White House, meanwhile, is trying to defuse the impact of campus protests over Israel's assault on Gaza, as some Democrats warn images of unrest could boost Trump and fear the issue could buckle [*President Joe Biden's*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) coalition.

This all comes as Republican House [*Speaker Mike Johnson*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/05/politics/mike-johnson-ouster-vote-marjorie-taylor-greene/index.html) faces a likely vote this week over his ouster in a fresh sign of GOP disarray fomented by Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene. He will need Democrats to save him.

It's just another normal week in American ***politics*** as unpredictable forces rock both parties and augur a tense run to an election - now six months less one day away - that could fundamentally change the nation.

The Trump trial enters pivotal stage

Trump faces another week in the Manhattan courtroom where he is on trial over the alleged falsification of business records to cover up an affair with adult film actress Story Daniels. Prosecutors argue he attempted a cover-up to mislead voters in 2016 in an early act of election interference. Trump denies the affair and has pleaded not guilty - to this and to three other criminal indictments.

Given the former president's frequent attacks on witnesses, which last week [*cost him $9,000*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/30/politics/donald-trump-fined-usd9-000-for-violating-gag-order-in-hush-money-case/index.html) over violations of gag orders, prosecutors are keeping witness lists under wraps. But in dramatic testimony last week, former White House communications director Hope Hicks [*took the stand*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/03/politics/donald-trump-trial-takeaways-hope-hicks-day-11/index.html) under a prosecution subpoena. In potentially the most significant moment of the trial so far, a nervous Hicks, who shed tears at one point, appeared to implicate Trump in a way that played into the prosecution argument when she said that the ex-president admitted to her that he knew his then-fixer Michael Cohen had paid Daniels. She also said that Trump felt it was better to deal with the story after the election than beforehand. But Trump's lawyer, Emil Bove, extracted a statement under cross-examination that could be useful to bolstering the core defense argument when Hicks said her boss was worried about the Daniels story because it could hurt or embarrass members of his family.

Another critical twist of the trial will arrive with the expected testimony of Cohen, Trump's former lawyer who served time in prison for tax fraud, making false statements to Congress and violating campaign finance laws.

As the trial continues, Trump's mood is becoming testy. He's offering new glimpses of the extremism that could drive his second term and is already posing a fresh challenge to American democracy, following his departure from office in disgrace in 2021 after trying to steal the last election based on false claims of fraud.

At a private luncheon at his Mar-a-Lago club on Saturday, he accused Democrats of "running a Gestapo administration," according to three attendees, equating the Biden team with the Nazi Secret Police who rounded up and committed genocide against Jews in the Holocaust.

Trump continually repeats his charge that his indictments are a result of a Democratic plot. But there is no evidence to support this. His comments about the Gestapo do not only betray historical ignorance but also underscore how there is no limit to the ex-president's use of inflammatory rhetoric to try to win the election. Last week, in an interview with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Trump [*refused to guarantee*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/02/politics/donald-trump-accept-2024-election-results/index.html) he'd accept the result of the next election. And in [*an interview with Time magazine*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/04/politics/fact-check-trump-time-magazine/index.html) published last week, he said violence was possible depending on the "fairness" of the election.

James Singer, a spokesperson for the Biden campaign, said Trump's remarks at the fundraiser proved the danger of a potential second term the ex-president has said would focus on retribution. "Trump is once again making despicable and insulting comments about the Holocaust, while in the same breath attacking law enforcement, celebrating political violence, and threatening our democracy," Singer said.

Democrats register growing alarm over protest fallout

Democrats face another week dealing with the political consequences of campus protests over Israel's war in Gaza.

A wave of [*protests at campuses*](https://www.cnn.com/business/live-news/university-protests-pro-palestinian-israel-05-05-24/index.html) over the civilian carnage in the enclave has emerged as a severe test for Biden's appeal among progressive and young voters whom he needs to help him to beat Trump in November.

After days of building political pressure, the president addressed the situation for the first time on camera last Thursday, saying that the right to protest was a vital American freedom but that it was not acceptable when demonstrations turn violent. He condemned antisemitic incidents that have been reported against some Jewish students and he said he wasn't rethinking his staunch support for Israel in the wake of the October 7 terror attacks - despite his frequently ignored calls on the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to do more to protect civilians in Gaza.

Trump and Republicans have seized on the protests - and police operations to clear them at some schools - to underscore their narrative that the country is spinning out of control under Biden and that Trump could restore law and order.

But speaking on CNN's "State of the Union" Sunday, the Biden campaign's national co-chair Mitch Landrieu pushed back on an analogy by Sen. Bernie Sanders, who likened the current protests to the anti-Vietnam war sentiment in 1968 that caused then-President Lyndon Johnson to abandon his reelection bid. Landrieu said the Independent senator from Vermont's view was an "over exaggeration." He added: "This is a very different circumstance. I think that people who actually lived through that very difficult time; they would say that this isn't comparable. However, that is not to say that this is not a very serious matter."

Some Democrats have downplayed the impact of the protests, citing polling that suggests that the war in Gaza is well down the list of concerns for most young voters, notwithstanding the dramatic scenes at many colleges. But Democratic Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, a staunch supporter of Israel during the conflict, warned that pro-Palestinian demonstrators could help Trump in November. "Like if they want to throw Michigan to Trump that way - well, if you want to play with that fire ... you better own that fire," said Fetterman, referring to a swing state where Arab Americans form an important part of the Democratic electorate. He also warned against liberal voters deserting Biden because of his stance on the war. "If you are willing to walk away or to actually vote for someone else, you are going to throw your vote away and you are on the Trump train and you better watch out for the wreck," he said.

But another leading Democrat, California Rep. Ro Khanna, said on CBS' "Face the Nation" that a lot of the protests across the country were seeing a constructive dialogue. "We have to understand that this is a defining moment for this generation, similar to anti-Vietnam protests, anti-apartheid protests, anti-Iraq War protests," he said. "They're telling us that over 30,000 people have died. It's time for this war to end. It's time for the hostages to be released that Hamas has, and they want to see leadership in America and around the world."

Johnson fights for survival, again

In another significant political drama looming this week, Johnson is expected to survive a vote called by Greene to oust him and throw the House GOP into yet more chaos. After Johnson pushed through Biden's request for billions of dollars in funding for Ukraine last month, Democrats are likely to vote to save the speaker. But even if he survives, no Republican speaker wants to leave the impression that he is only in power because of the opposition party, and the Louisiana lawmaker's long-term future remains cloudy.

Many Republicans, even those cool on the rookie speaker, don't want to see another governing farce unfold like the multi-vote ballot to choose Johnson's predecessor, Kevin McCarthy, and the vote to oust - and then replace - the Californian last year.

Right-wing extremists, taking advantage of the tiny GOP majority, have made the House all but ungovernable since the party took over after the 2022 midterm elections. But despite signs that Greene's patron, Trump, has praised Johnson and is not enthusiastic about more chaos in the party that could complicate his and the GOP's chances in the fall, she is vowing to push ahead after accusing Johnson of betraying Republican base voters.

Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN

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**Load-Date:** May 14, 2024

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