

# [***A defining week set to lay bare the choice in the 2024 election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BG7-GMM1-JBSS-S0NB-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; A defining week in ***politics*** will clarify the choice Americans will face in November in a fateful and unprecedented election that is already testing long-held interpretations of the Constitution and the powers of the presidency.

The Supreme Court on Monday [*rejected a push*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/04/politics/trump-supreme-court-colorado-14th-amendment) in Colorado to throw ex-President Donald Trump off the ballot because of the 14th Amendment's ban on insurrectionists.

[*Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45) is meanwhile expected to emerge from the 15-state [*Super Tuesday GOP primaries*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/03/politics/what-to-know-super-tuesday-what-matters/index.html) within touching distance of a third straight Republican nomination. As he seeks a stunning White House return four years after trying to overturn the last election, the ex-president is showing a new term would be even more extreme than his first.

[*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden), meanwhile, will take the stage before a huge television audience two nights later for his State of the Union address. It's a critical test for an 81-year-old commander in chief facing deep doubts that he's fit to serve a second term as he's beset by global crises and disappointment with his performance at home.

A race between the current president and the ex-president is one that polls show many Americans dread. But Trump and Biden's turns in the spotlight this week will highlight their all-but-certain rematch, barring health crises or other surprise events. Biden is highly vulnerable in a race that has no clear leader, according to the CNN Poll of Polls average.

November's election is already heaping pressure on political and electoral institutions, the Constitution and America's fragile national unity. The country has never had an election in which one candidate faces [*multiple criminal trials*](https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2023/07/politics/trump-indictments-criminal-cases/) and is running on the false premise that he was illegally ousted from power.

Following Monday's Supreme Court decision in the Colorado case, Trump's name will appear on ballots that were printed weeks ago. Without a ruling from the justices, there was no guarantee voters who pick Trump would have their choice counted if justices decided he was ineligible to serve.

The Supreme Court last week [*agreed to hear another massive case, over Trump's claims*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/28/politics/trump-supreme-court-immunity/index.html) of sweeping presidential immunity, which he's made in response to his indictment for attempting to steal the 2020 election. The move further delayed the ex-president's federal criminal trial over election interference, which Trump - who is seeking to push off his trials past the 2024 election - touted as a win.

Both cases pose enormous questions about the legal foundation of the electoral system and whether presidents are truly subject to the same laws as other citizens.

Four years ago, the Super Tuesday Democratic primaries saw Biden pull off a staggering political comeback, routing his rival, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and taking a decisive hold on the Democratic nomination. This year's edition will likely prove similarly decisive for Trump, who is aiming for a sweep of big states to build on his cruise through early state contests and hopes to finally crush his last-remaining rival, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley. A third nomination for Trump would represent an extraordinary comeback after he left office in disgrace two weeks after a mob of his supporters smashed their way into the US Capitol in an attempt to thwart certification of Biden's election win.

Ahead of a likely general election clash, Trump's appetite for testing the rule of law and the Constitution is undimmed. He is promising a presidency of "retribution" against his political enemies in a campaign pulsating with some of the most venomous anti-immigrant and autocratic rhetoric in modern US history.

Biden's appearance in the House of Representatives on Thursday night, therefore, will not just mark a vital opportunity to court a primetime audience and to cultivate buzz that will reach many more viewers on social media. It will personify the implicit narrative of his campaign: that while voters may worry about the oldest president in history in a second term that would end when he's 86, he's the final bulwark between a second Trump presidency, which he warns could trash democracy.

Trump's momentum is growing

The former president's march toward the Republican nomination [*accelerated over the weekend*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/missouri-idaho-republican-caucus-michigan-convention-03-02-24/index.html) with his victories in the Idaho and Missouri caucuses and after he locked up [*all Michigan's delegates*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/02/politics/trump-michigan-convention-delegates/index.html) to go with his thumping win in the state's primary last week.

The GOP front-runner will not be able to reach the 1,215 delegates he needs to win the nomination on Tuesday night, but his expected victories in a run of states with 865 delegates at stake will make him the presumptive GOP nominee in all but name. According to CNN's latest calculations, Trump has 247 delegates compared with Haley's 43. She scored her first victory Sunday night when [*she won the GOP primary in Washington, DC*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/03/politics/nikki-haley-dc-primary/index.html).

Trump's dominance of the GOP primary race has enabled him to consolidate the congressional leaders of the party around him. South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican leader in the Senate, [*endorsed him*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/25/politics/john-thune-donald-trump-endorsement/index.html) last week. And last week's announcement from Mitch McConnell that he'll soon [*step down*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/28/politics/mitch-mcconnell-stepping-down-leadership-senate-gop/index.html) as Senate GOP leader underscored the ex-president's populist, nationalist transformation of a party once rooted in fiscal conservatism and globalism.

Haley, stung by the [*loss of her own state primary*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/25/politics/nikki-haley-south-carolina-loss/index.html) in South Carolina last month, vowed Sunday to "keep fighting" because "70% of Americans say they don't want Donald Trump or Joe Biden." But there will be increasing pressure on her to bow out of the race if her opponent blows her out of the water Tuesday.

"At some point, you have got to call it," GOP Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma told CNN's Dana Bash on "State of the Union" on Sunday. "I thought she would call it after she lost her own state in a horrible fashion. Now that we go into Super Tuesday, there's not a chance she's going to win a single state."

As Trump consolidates his power within the GOP, his rhetoric is becoming even wilder, in a campaign that is now inseparable from his defense in his multiple criminal trials. The ex-president, posing as a political "dissident," falsely styles his daunting bill of [*hundreds of millions of dollars*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/01/investing/trump-money-judgments/index.html) in restitution after several lost civil cases as proof of a campaign of political persecution by the Biden administration.

On Saturday, Trump characteristically projected onto Biden the exact offense of which he is accused in several criminal cases, underscoring the threat the ex-president would pose to democratic institutions if he won back the White House.

He told supporters in Greensboro, North Carolina, that Biden's conduct amid a southern border crisis was tantamount to "a conspiracy to overthrow the United States of America." He said: "Biden and his accomplices want to collapse the American system, nullify the will of the actual American voters and establish a new base power that gives them control for generations."

Trump's comments reflect the vital importance of his case before the Supreme Court on his claim of almost blanket presidential immunity. The case is important not just in relation to his interference in the 2020 election; it points to his aspirations for unfettered political power if he wins in November.

Biden is failing to quell concerns about his age

As his likely contest with Trump looms, Biden heads into the State of the Union address under enormous pressure to cut a vigorous and optimistic figure. He needs to show he's a president in command and can transmit a vision for the future.

A new round of polls released over the weekend underscored Biden's challenges. The surveys portray a nation that most voters feel is headed in the wrong direction as they wait to feel economic benefits that official data show - and the White House insists - is a strong recovery. Biden looks vulnerable in these surveys on his management of the economy, inflation, the southern US border, the war in Ukraine and the war between Israel and Hamas.

But the most striking aspect of the new surveys by [*The New York Times/Siena College*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/03/us/politics/biden-age-trump-poll.html) and [*The Wall Street Journal*](https://s.wsj.net/public/resources/documents/WSJ_Partial_Results_Feb_2024.pdf) lies in the profound concerns many voters have about the president's age and his capacity. A majority of voters who backed Biden in 2020 now say he's too old to serve effectively as president, according to the Times poll. There are fewer concerns about the 77-year-old Trump's capacity. In the Wall Street Journal survey, 73% of respondents said Biden was too old to run for reelection. Some 52% thought the same of Trump.

The president has in recent weeks tried to deflect such concerns by joking about his age. And last week, he was [*certified as fit to serve*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/28/politics/biden-annual-physical-2024/index.html) by his medical team after his annual physical examination. Biden has also spent recent weeks seeking to shore up key elements of his coalition, including union workers and minority and younger voters. And Democrats plan to jam Republicans over hardline abortion restrictions backed by Republican state legislatures and conservative judges in the wake of the overturning of the nationwide constitutional right to an abortion by the Supreme Court.

But the new polling suggests the president's efforts have done little to dismantle one of his biggest obstacles to reelection - his age. That's why his State of the Union address is shaping up to be one of the most important such speeches this century.

The appearance will come at a fraught moment. Another end-of-the-week deadline is looming to [*avert a government shutdown*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/03/politics/government-spending-bills-shutdown/index.html). While leaders of both congressional chambers have reached a bipartisan spending deal, the tiny GOP House majority means any piece of legislation is a heavy lift. Biden is, meanwhile, under pressure as he [*pushes for a long-term pause*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/03/politics/kamala-harris-gaza-ceasefire/index.html) in the fighting in Gaza between Israel and Hamas. Last week's Michigan primary showed how anger among Arab American and progressive voters over his handling of the war [*could threaten his prospects*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/28/politics/biden-michigan-vulnerabilities-israel-gaza/index.html) in a vital general election swing state. Biden is also demanding [*House Speaker Mike Johnson*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/03/politics/mike-johnson-ukraine-funding/index.html) put a foreign aid bill on the floor that would send $60 billion in weapons and other aid to Ukraine.

Last year, Biden's annual address was something of a triumph, as he shut down Republicans who heckled him and laid a trap for them as Democrats sought to portray the House majority as extreme. The president positioned himself as the last line of defense against the excesses of what he has called "ultra MAGA" Republicans. This is still the cornerstone of his reelection strategy.

This year, the visual impression that the oldest president in history sends about his vigor and mental acuity may be as important as anything he actually says.

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