

# [***How RFK Jr. Debate Performance Could Sway 2024 Election***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1W-BFM1-DY68-117P-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Robert F. Kennedy Jr. could benefit either main candidate if he takes part in the 2024 presidential debates according to a top political scientist.

**Body**

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. could aid either [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) or [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) depending on "which RFK Jr. shows up" if he's allowed to participate in the [*two scheduled presidential debates*](https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-attacks-joe-biden-us-presidential-election-debate-truth-social-1901237?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), a leading political scientist told *Newsweek*.

On Wednesday both Biden and Trump agreed to take part in two debates scheduled for June 27 and September 10. [*CNN*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cnn?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) is due to host the first event in Georgia and [*ABC*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/abc?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) will hold the second, though they haven't announced the location.

Thomas Gift, who heads the Centre on U.S. ***Politics*** at University College London, argued Kennedy Jr. could pose a threat to both main candidates. "RFK, Jr. has as much potential to take away votes from Trump as he does from Biden. Ultimately, it depends on which RFK, Jr. shows up to the debates, and what the topics are," he told *Newsweek.*

Kennedy Jr. initially ran for the Democratic presidential nomination before dropping out and announcing he would stand as an independent. As a well-known environmentalist and vaccine skeptic he could take votes from both main candidates, making his performance and which states he gets on the ballot potentially decisive factors in November's election.

On X, formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), Kennedy Jr. claimed he will qualify for the CNN presidential debate on June 27, though the network hasn't announced him as a participant.

On Wednesday he posted: "I'm happy to report that I will meet the criteria to participate in the @CNN debate before the June 20 deadline. I look forward to holding Presidents Biden and Trump accountable for their records in Atlanta on June 27 to give Americans the debate they deserve."

Gift added: "If Kennedy gets to go on a rant about COVID vaccines and government conspiracies, it will damage Trump by eating into his populist support. If, instead, the themes veer into tackling climate change, increasing the minimum wage, and aiding labor rights, it will hurt Biden by taking some of the wind out of his sails."

*Newsweek* contacted the [*Robert F. Kennedy Jr.*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/robert-f-kennedy-jr?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), Joe Biden and Donald Trump presidential campaigns for comment by email.

David B. Cohen, who teaches ***politics*** at the University of Akron, agreed it is hard to tell which candidate Kennedy Jr. will benefit in the overall race.

In an [*interview with Newsweek*](https://www.newsweek.com/rfk-jr-2024-election-polls-trump-biden-1900412?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) he said: "Robert Kennedy, Jr. is going to impact the race, but how he will impact it is very difficult to predict.

"This is not to say that Kennedy has a chance of winning in November—he doesn't. But he can—and just may—well be a spoiler. Kennedy will likely be on the ballot of most if not all, battleground states."

A [*survey of eligible U.S. voters*](https://www.newsweek.com/rfk-jr-gets-boost-ballot-fight-1897765?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) conducted exclusively for *Newsweek* on May 1 found a sizable majority believe Kennedy Jr. should be "allowed" on the presidential ballot in all 50 states.

When asked: 'To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Robert F Kennedy Jr. should be allowed on the ballot in all 50 states in the 2024 Presidential Election?' 28 percent of those surveyed answered "strongly agree," and another 26 percent responded "agree."

By contrast, only 7 percent replied "strongly disagree," with another 6 percent for "disagree." The remainder was made up of 24 percent who answered "neither agree nor disagree" and 9 percent who said "don't know."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2394266/robert-f-kennedy-jr.jpg)

**Graphic**

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Roy Rochlin/GETTY

Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. visits "Fox & Friends" at Fox News Channel Studios on April 02, 2024 in New York City. Kennedy Jr. could benefit either Joe Biden or Donald Trump is he takes part in the scheduled presidential debates according to a top political scientist.

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