

# [***Joe Biden's 'Remarkable' Loss to Donald Trump Over Campus Protests***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C10-MY71-DY68-10KW-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

May 12, 2024 Sunday 6:00 AM EST

Copyright © 2024 Newsweek Inc. All Rights Reserved



**Length:** 1208 words

**Byline:** Andrew Stanton

**Highlight:** Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas conflict could change how college students vote in November, according to a new poll.

**Body**

President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s handling of the conflict between Israel and Hamas could be crucial to his support among college students, according to a new poll.

College students have found themselves at the center of the domestic debate over the war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). Pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses have [*spread across the United States*](https://www.newsweek.com/map-college-campus-protest-arrests-1896781?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in recent weeks as students raise concerns about the death toll of Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched an attack against Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostage. In the months that followed, Israel's offensive has killed more than 34,800 Palestinians in Gaza, the Associated Press reported, citing local health officials. More than 80 percent of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced in the conflict.

These protests could have political ramifications for Biden, who is set to face off against former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in the November presidential election. Although neither the Democratic or [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) conventions have been held, both candidates have won enough delegates to secure their respective party's presidential nominations.

Biden is facing backlash from many young, progressive voters over his support for Israel. He has cast himself as an Israel supporter, arguing the country has the right to defend itself from Hamas while also urging its military to do more to ensure civilians are not killed in the violence.

Recently he has [*drawn a red line*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-rafah-red-line-upends-us-israel-relationship-1898751?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) with Israel, saying on Wednesday the United States would not supply bombs to Israel that could be used to attack Rafah, a border crossing that connects Gaza to Egypt. He has also halted a shipment of 3,500 bombs to Israel due to concerns they could be used in a ground assault into Gaza

A new poll for *Newsweek* administered by College Pulse found that Biden's response to the conflict could shape how college students vote in November.

Biden holds a lead over Trump with college students, who tend to be a more liberal voting group. Thirty percent of respondents said they plan to support Biden, while 20 percent plan to back Trump. An additional 3 percent are voting for Dr. [*Cornel West*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cornel-west?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), 6 percent for Green Party candidate Jill Stein and 13 percent are backing another candidate.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents said they are not planning to vote in the presidential race.

While most college students will not be swayed based on his response, 37 percent of respondents said they will consider changing their vote based on Biden's response.

Eight percent said they would consider changing their vote to Trump. Four percent said Biden's response could make them more likely to vote for West, and another four percent said the same for Stein.

Only 6 percent of respondents said his response could win him over.

"Even though the numbers are small, what strikes me in particular is that Biden is losing more votes to Trump than he is gaining," Grant Davis Reeher, a professor of political science at Syracuse University said. "That's really remarkable, given the group and the issue."

However, 15 percent said Biden's response to the conflict may convince them not to vote at all in the presidential election.

The survey was conducted from May 4 to 5, 2024, among 804 undergraduates enrolled full-time in four-year programs from 328 colleges and universities in the United States. Its margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Other polls have suggested Israel may not be a significant issue for all young voters. An April 22 poll from *The Economist* and YouGov found that only one percent of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 said foreign policy is the most important issue for them.

*Newsweek* reached out to Biden and Trump's campaign for comment via email.

**Biden Has More to Lose on Israel, Experts Say**

Reeher told *Newsweek* that Biden "clearly has more to lose" because Trump is in the "preferred position" by not having to be the one responsible for making and being held accountable for U.S. policy on Israel.

Furthermore, younger voters have "not been a big source of support for [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), so there is less at stake for them on this issue," he said.

While Biden losing college students' votes to Trump because of this issue surprised Reeher, the number of students saying they may simply sit out the election due to Biden's policy may be most concerning for Biden.

He warned that it may be "extremely hard if not impossible" for Biden to thread the needle between support for Israel and not losing college students' votes.

"Turnout is always the concern for [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) regarding younger voters. Can they be mobilized and counted on? President Biden has invested a lot in those voters through student loan forgiveness—which has been controversial, especially among blue-collar workers—and through his subsidy proposal for first-time home buyers.​ This war seems to have short-circuited those efforts," he said.

Tammy Vigil, senior associate dean at Boston University's College of Communication, told Newsweek that Trump has an advantage over Biden, who will "take the blame because he is the person occupying the Oval Office."

"Trump has the advantage of being able to criticize Biden for any real or perceived activity or inactivity and outcomes," she said.

She said college-aged students often have a "purist" point of view on ***politics*** and typically want candidates who are "perfectly aligned with them on key issues."

It may be difficult for Biden to win back these "disillusioned idealist" voters on other issues like the economy and student loans, Vigil added.

"The most concerning part of the polling, in my opinion, is the 'not to vote' camp. I am not sure if those folks are thinking of their lack of activity as a form of civic protest, but almost no one will really read it that way. Most people will simply dismiss the non-voters as apathetic," she said.

Robert Y. Shapiro, a political science professor at Columbia University, said Biden has more to lose because college students are "less inclined to vote for Trump from the start."

"The concern for the Democrats is that Biden would lose a small but significant enough percentage of their votes in key states to the third-party candidates, or they would not vote at all—votes that Biden would otherwise get," he said.

Democrats have to depend on pro-Palestinian voters viewing a Trump victory as "worse on multiple fronts" and that their support could be crucial in some states.

"This could be decisive in these states where the Democrats will need not only these younger voters but also Arab-American voters and votes from members of other minority groups and from other voters angered over the oppression in Gaza and of the Palestinians in general," he said.

Meena Bose, executive dean of Hofstra University's Peter S. Kalikow School of Government, told *Newsweek* that many students will begin following the election closer to November.

"Politically engaged and active students may have decided which candidate they will support, but that could change in the coming months based on events, candidate platforms, and other variables," she said. "Without a doubt, in this critical election year, shifts in voter support could be highly significant, particularly in swing states."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2389380/how-israel-hamas-war-change-election.jpg)

**Graphic**

How Israel, Hamas War Change Election

Photo-illustration by Newsweek/Getty

How Israel, Hamas War Change Election

**Load-Date:** May 12, 2024

**End of Document**