

# [***Can Joe Biden Be Replaced? Senior Democrats Face Tough Decision***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BBV-T171-JBR6-914K-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Concerns about the president's age have led to harsh criticism in the media but Biden is likely to remain the Democratic candidate.

**Body**

President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) is the presumptive Democratic nominee for president in 2024 and it would be extremely difficult to replace him, according to political scientists who spoke to *Newsweek.*

Biden's age and cognitive abilities are coming under renewed scrutiny since the publication of Special Counsel Robert Hur's report that raised questions about his memory.

Since the publication of that report, which described the president as an "elderly man with a poor memory," Biden has been heavily criticized in op-eds published by left-leaning media outlets, with some even calling for him to step aside.

Even if senior figures in the party wanted to substitute Biden for another candidate, they are not in a position to remove him at this time. Only the president could take the steps necessary to exit the race.

*Newsweek* has reached out to the Biden campaign via email for comment.

**Biden's Age and Media Criticism**

Hur's report said that [*criminal charges were not warranted*](https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-joe-biden-classified-documents-report-robert-hur-willful-no-charges-1868423?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) against Biden following a probe of his handling of classified documents but the report also commented on Biden's memory.

The report said Biden "did not remember, even within several years, [*when his son Beau died*](https://www.newsweek.com/maga-pounces-biden-doj-questions-mental-fitness-report-1868376?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)"—a claim that the president angrily denied during a televised press conference on February 8 just hours after the report was published.

Several [*left-leaning media outlets criticized*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-faces-onslaught-left-wing-media-1869793?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Biden's response to concerns about his age and memory, with *The New York Times* editorial board saying the press conference "raised more questions about his cognitive sharpness and temperament."

On February 13, *The Atlantic* published an op-ed by Damon Linker, senior lecturer in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, arguing that [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) "should pick a new presidential candidate now."

**Picking a New Candidate**

The [*Democratic Party*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democratic-party?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) cannot simply drop Biden and choose another nominee. They are bound by the rules of the primary process—Biden has won every Democratic primary so far and all the available delegates.

The filing deadline to run in Democratic primaries has already passed in 44 states, according to analysis from [*Vox*](https://www.vox.com/24067941/joe-biden-2024-age-democrats-alternate-candidates)published on February 12, meaning no new candidate can qualify for those primaries.

Delegates are pledged to vote for whichever candidate won their primary in the first round of voting at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago which will be held from August 19 to 22.

By that time, Biden will almost certainly have enough delegates to ensure the nomination. He needs 1,969 of a total of 3,936.

Theoretically, Biden could instruct those delegates not to vote for him, but only the president can make that decision. Freeing his delegates could cause chaos at the convention. The last contested convention—also known as a brokered convention—was in 1952 and resulted in Democrats nominating Adlai Stevenson.

No sitting president has failed to win re-nomination by his party in modern U.S. history and no incumbent has declined to run again in more than 50 years.

In March 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced he was dropping out of the race but he was facing two strong primary challengers—Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert F. Kennedy.

**Removing Biden**

The practical problems of removing Biden are significant, while the political difficulties may be even greater. A divided convention would be a problem for Democrats, according to Thomas Gift, founding director of the Centre on U.S. ***Politics*** at University College London.

"Replacing Biden is practically possible, but unlikely at this late stage. Biden has had plenty of opportunities to bow out gracefully. He refused," Gift told *Newsweek.*

"To think that something will change now seems like wishful thinking among progressives who always wanted him off the ticket," he went on.

Gift added that Biden's "time to exit was months ago when potential replacements could have vied for delegates through the normal primary process."

"Throwing the Democrat National Convention into a tailspin, with no obvious heir apparent, doesn't seem like an obviously better choice than the status quo," he said.

Paul Quirk, a political science professor at the University of British Columbia in Canada, told *Newsweek* that "the reality is that no one is in a position to remove Biden as the presumptive Democratic nominee, except Biden."

"Many or even most senior Democrats might prefer that he step aside. But they don't have mechanisms for discussing the matter in confidence, arriving at a collective decision, and imposing it on Biden, other party members, and primary voters," he said.

Quirk added that American political parties "don't have such organizational capabilities."

"If they did, the [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) would have been rid of Trump long ago. Any senior Democrat who prefers that Biden step aside is unlikely to say so—except confidentially, in private settings, without consequence," he said.

**A Partisan Hit Job**

Hur's report has been heavily criticized for its reference to Biden's memory. Quirk told *Newsweek* that criticism is noteworthy.

"At this stage, we have seen no clear evidence that Biden has had enough cognitive decline to compromise his performance as president," Quirk said.

"He has been, if anything, surprisingly effective in policy terms. The special counsel's report that called attention to Biden's 'memory problems' has been widely disparaged as a partisan hit job," he said.

"Who remembers what they did with various old documents several years later? Nor have there been rumors about White House staff or congressional leaders worrying that Biden was not up to the job," Quirk added.

However, future concerns about Biden may be warranted. The president is 81 years old and the oldest serving president in U.S. history. If he is re-elected in November, Biden will be 82 on inauguration day 2025 and 86 when his second term ends.

"The legitimate concern about Biden's age is that by the end of a second term, he would be almost five years older than he is now," Quirk told *Newsweek.* "There is obvious potential for serious cognitive failure by then. And if it occurred, the real danger is that Biden would fail to recognize it, and refuse to let his vice president take over."

"From the standpoint of the campaign, Biden's age should be less of an issue than Trump's more apparent cognitive decline—displayed in slurred speech and gross, repeated errors in one campaign rally after another," Quirk went on.

The Biden campaign [*has attacked Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-slurring-donald-trump-nra-speech-1868751?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on exactly those grounds. On February 9, the campaign highlighted the former president's apparent slurring and confused state on X, formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), during his speech at a National Rifle Association ([*NRA*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/nra?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)) convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

"Biden may feel confident that he would best Trump in the more intensive, side-by-side comparisons that would occur during the campaign," Quirk said.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2349995/replacing-joe-biden-democrats-face-tough-decision.jpg)

**Graphic**

Replacing Joe Biden? Democrats Face Tough Decision

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