

# [***One Biden Message That Could be Hurting Trump***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B8Y-2CP1-JBR6-9002-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Daniel Bush

**Highlight:** Polling and early primary results suggest key 2024 voting groups are open to the Biden campaign's message that Donald Trump represents a threat to democracy.

**Body**

President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s argument that [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) represents a threat to democracy appears to be gaining traction with some critical voting groups in the early stages of the 2024 race, a potential bright spot for Biden as he struggles to break through on the economy and other issues.

Polling and early primary results suggest [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and some independents are open to the Biden campaign's message that a second Trump term would damage the country's democratic institutions beyond repair and weaken its standing in the world — though polls also show a majority of [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) think Biden represents a threat to democracy.

Americans believe the 2024 election would impact the "future of democracy" in the U.S. more than any other issue besides the economy and government spending, a recent AP-NORC [*poll*](https://apnorc.org/projects/widespread-feeling-that-the-2024-presidential-election-carries-serious-stakes-for-the-country/?doing_wp_cron=1706904152.4616599082946777343750) found. Concerns around democracy beat out immigration, abortion, and climate change, among other voter priorities, according to the poll, which was taken last December. The poll found that 54 percent of Americans believe electing Trump would weaken democracy, compared to 48 percent who believed that re-electing Biden would weaken democracy.

A separate Harvard CAPS-Harris [*poll*](https://harvardharrispoll.com/) from last month also found that a slim majority of Americans think Trump is a threat to democracy. That included 84 percent of Democrats polled and 20 percent of Republicans. Some 16 percent of Democrats polled thought Trump was not a threat. The poll results did not say whether respondents had been asked if they thought Biden was a threat to democracy.

"One of the best ways to motivate people to get to the polls is by fear and anger," said Danielle Vinson, a professor of ***politics*** and international affairs at Furman University in South Carolina. Turning the focus on Trump could help Biden "get voters to look past high grocery prices."

The Biden campaign hasn't seen similar success so far in its messaging on other key issues in the 2024 race. The same Harvard CAPS-Harris poll found that a majority of voters disapprove of Biden's handling of the economy, immigration and foreign policy issues like the conflict between Israel and [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Biden's overall job approval numbers are well below 50 percent, and he is running neck and neck or trailing Trump in national and battleground state polls.

But Biden's reelection campaign got off to a strong start with victories in New Hampshire and South Carolina against two long-shot primary challengers. Democratic strategists argued Biden's threats-to-democracy messaging contributed to Trump's relatively poor showing with moderate Republicans and independent voters in the New Hampshire Republican primary last month.

Trump easily won the New Hampshire primary, but former South Carolina governor [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/nikki-haley?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), who finished second, beat Trump by 19 percentage points among independents or undeclared voters, according to [*exit polls*](https://abcnews.go.com/Elections/new-hampshire-exit-polls-2024-primary-election-results-analysis). Haley also beat Trump by 52 points among moderates.

Haley also dominated among the 42 percent of Republican primary voters who said they didn't think Trump would be fit to serve as president if he is convicted of a crime. A small percentage of Trump supporters agreed, as did Trump backers who participated in the 2024 Iowa caucuses, according to a statewide survey.

"His support amongst moderates and even strong Republicans if he's convicted is tenuous at best," said Matt Paul, a former senior advisor to [*Hillary Clinton*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hillary-clinton?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and a principal at Cornerstone Public Affairs. "That's very troubling for [Trump]."

Trump faces felony charges by the [*Department of Justice*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/department-justice?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) for allegedly mishandling classified information after leaving office and working to overturn the 2020 election. He has also been indicted in two separate cases. Trump has denied wrongdoing and is fighting all the charges in court, saying the slew of cases against him are politically motivated.

Biden used his first campaign speech to argue that "democracy is on the ballot" in 2024.

Speaking in Pennsylvania on the eve of the third anniversary of the Jan. 6 insurrection by Trump supporters, Biden criticized the former president for spreading the lie that the 2020 election was stolen from him, and rebuked Trump for a social media post calling for the "termination" of the Constitution in order to change the results of the 2020 election.

In a December, 2022 post on his social media site Truth Social, Trump wrote that "a Massive Fraud of this type and magnitude allows for the termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution."

**Appeal**

Biden also made a direct appeal to "mainstream" Republicans and independents as he went after Trump.

"MAGA voices [have] abandoned the truth and abandoned the democracy," Biden said. "Now the rest of us, Democrats, independents, mainstream Republicans, we have to make our choice."

The Biden campaign declined a *Newsweek* request for comment.

Biden's effort to make the election a referendum on Trump reflects the campaign's belief that most Americans are eager to move on from the former president and his continued focus on his 2020 election loss.

But focusing on threats to democracy is also an acknowledgment of the deep frustrations many voters have about the democratic process.

"We see a significant portion of Americans who have lost faith in the process," said Benjamin Hovland, the vice chair of the United States Election Assistance Commission, the government agency tasked with improving election administration. Trust in democracy has eroded despite the fact that Trump's claims about 2020 have been disproven and thrown out in court, Hovland said.

"There has been no election pored over more than the 2020 election and there is just no there there" to Trump's claims, he said.

Republicans argued Biden is focused on threats to democracy — as well as protecting access to abortion after the [*Supreme Court*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/supreme-court?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) overturned Roe v. Wade — because Biden doesn't have many other issues to fall back on to energize Democrats in a likely general election matchup against Trump.

"They're backed into a corner and they're going with the playbook they know," Robert Blizzard, a Republican pollster, said of Biden and down-ballot Democrats running in 2024. "They don't want the election to be about the economy, crime, or the border. They want it to be about threats to democracy and abortion."

Biden beat Trump in 2020 in part by arguing that his opponent would weaken democracy at home and abroad. Democrats used a similar message to beat expectations in the 2022 midterms, arguing that the Republican Party was beholden to Trump and had moved too far to the right on abortion and other issues.

But the threats-to-democracy messaging in particular could cut both ways in 2024, Blizzard and others said, since it highlights public disapproval with the government at a time when Biden is in power and gives oxygen to a debate about which forces pose the greatest threat to American democracy.

*Newsweek* requested comment from the Trump campaign.

Trump has long said he's the target of a so-called "deep state" network of officials working to undermine him from within federal intelligence and law enforcement agencies and other parts of the government.

The view is popular among many Republicans in [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), where House Republicans led by Trump ally and Judiciary Committee Chairman [*Jim Jordan*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/jim-jordan?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) of Ohio created a select subcommittee to investigate the alleged "weaponization of the federal government."

Republicans have also pointed to the decision by the Department of Justice last year to indict Trump as further proof that the Biden administration is trying to jail the president's top political rival.

Trump has embraced that argument as well, but there's little reason to think it'll help him sway key swing voters in November, said Vinson, the ***politics*** expert at Furman University. Making a "case that Biden is the [greater] threat to democracy" will likely only appeal to hardcore Trump voters, she said, not the moderate Republicans and independents he needs to beat Biden.

Most voters won't start paying attention to the election until the summer, said Paul. But Biden's early messaging push puts "the critical issue of democracy" front and center, Paul said, "and the contrast could not be clearer."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2345314/biden-first-2024-campaign-speech.jpg)

**Graphic**

Biden first 2024 campaign speech

Drew Angerer/Getty Images

President Joe Biden made threats to democracy a central theme in his first campaign speech, on January 5, 2024 in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.

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