

# [***The Democratic Party May Be Stuck With Biden for Good | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF8-3XT1-DY68-10C6-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** President Biden's brutal polling numbers against disgraced former President Trump have been causing major controversy inside the Democratic Party's big tent.

**Body**

President Biden's brutal polling numbers against disgraced former President Trump have been causing major controversy inside the [*Democratic Party*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democratic-party?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s big tent. Last night's ambiguous results in Michigan, where a group of progressive activists organized an "uncommitted" campaign to protest the Biden administration's policies in Gaza, only added petrol to the conflagration. Did the more than 100,000 Michigan Democrats [*who cast*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/28/us/politics/michigan-primary-biden-trump.html)a protest vote for "uncommitted" represent a real threat to Biden's campaign, or were they well within historical norms for incumbent presidents in primaries? The argument will rage all week long, but the reality is that the only thing that will satisfy those asking Biden to hand the baton to someone else is for his national polling to dramatically improve, and soon.

First, a quick look at the objective reality facing the president. He has led just four of the past 30 publicly available head-to-head polls against Trump, [*according to*](https://www.realclearpolling.com/polls/president/general/2024/trump-vs-biden)*RealClearPolitics*. Broadening the aperture to the five-way race that includes independent or third-party candidates like [*Robert F. Kennedy Jr.*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/robert-f-kennedy-jr?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), the situation is even more alarming. Biden [*has trailed*](https://www.realclearpolling.com/polls/president/general/2024/trump-vs-biden-vs-kennedy-vs-west-vs-stein) in 18 of the last 20 polls of the five-candidate race that many voters are likely to encounter on the ballot this November. Between the grim horserace polling and his consistently terrible approval ratings, Biden is in arguably [*the worst position*](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2023/12/biden-trump-2024-campaign-polls-nyt-siena.html) for an incumbent president seeking re-election in decades.

Those polls, and not the how long in the tooth our president may be as narrated by world-renowned aging and memory specialist Robert Hur in his recent special counsel report, are driving this wedge into the Democratic coalition. If it were Biden leading most surveys, party elites and high-profile analysts would almost certainly be willing to look past his advanced age and uninspiring performances in many of his public appearances. But because Democrats correctly view the possibility of a Trump restoration as a potential catastrophe without parallel in modern American history, everyone is freaking out.

Even if Biden decided to get out of the way tomorrow morning, the party would have a significant coordination problem on its hands. It is too late for plausible candidates to get [*on the ballot*](https://ballotpedia.org/State_and_federal_candidate_filing_deadlines_for_2024) in all but a handful of late-voting states in the party's nominating process. So Biden could continue to roll up his delegates and then "release" them to vote as they please at the convention, or new entrants into the race could run write-in campaigns to try to accumulate as many delegates as possible. It is not clear whether Biden would endorse Vice President [*Kamala Harris*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kamala-harris?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), but even if he did, he could not actually compel his own delegates to vote for her.

Either way, it is almost certainly too late for anyone but Biden to arrive at the DNC with a majority. For many Democrats, that's the beginning and the end of it. Whether he should or shouldn't have run, they argue, this is our guy. Former *Boston Globe* columnist [*Michael Cohen*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/michael-cohen?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*concedes on Substack*](https://truthandcons.substack.com/p/please-stop-suggesting-that-joe-biden?r=cdj3q&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web) that it would be better if Biden had not run for re-election but that at this point "you have to reckon with the fact that jettisoning Biden from the ticket is likely a riskier proposition than sticking with him."

But that's not what everyone sees. In an episode of his podcast earlier this month, *New York Times* columnist Ezra Klein made [*an extended case*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/16/opinion/ezra-klein-biden-audio-essay.html) for President Biden to step aside and for the Democratic nominee to be decided at an open convention this August in Chicago. "Fatalism this far before the election is ridiculous," he said. Embrace the chaos.

Klein admits that it is too late for the nominee to be chosen as part of the standard primary process, but a contested convention where the party's up-and-coming stars like Michigan Gov. [*Gretchen Whitmer*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/gretchen-whitmer?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and Georgia Sen. [*Raphael Warnock*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/raphael-warnock?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) duke it out for the nomination on national TV would be compelling theater that could also produce a strong nominee. The whole thing could "make the Democrats into the most exciting political show on earth," or, as he also admits, could be a fiasco.

Klein's broadside, coming from someone not generally known for his love of radical procedural maneuvers, brought into the open a debate what has been roiling quietly between Democrats for months and ignited a public firestorm. Fellow *Times* columnist Michelle Goldberg had already endorsed this last-ditch maneuver, too, in an essay published a few days before Klein's podcast, arguing that if Biden can't figure out a way to campaign vigorously, "he should find some medical pretext to step aside in time for a replacement to be chosen at the Democratic convention."

But some Democrats find the idea of waiting until August to decide on a nominee to be completely absurd. *Talking Points Memo'*s Josh Marshall pushed back hard on Klein's idea, calling it a "a highly pessimistic but not unreasonable analysis of the present situation." But he called the idea of an open convention "a recipe for paralysis" and said there is "no viable path to switching to anyone else." At *The Nation*, Joan Walsh [*called Klein*](https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2023/12/biden-trump-2024-campaign-polls-nyt-siena.html) "unmoored from political reality" and asked whether an open convention wouldn't become a divisive trainwreck and "a forum for litigating highly divisive issues like Gaza, Medicare for All and the broader contest between progressives and establishment-oriented liberals."

At the heart of this tension is a functionally unresolvable tension. Biden's allies, even highly reluctant ones, believe that time spent debating whether he should be the nominee is wasted and only empowers Trump. Those who believe he must go think it is their critics who are the ones endangering democracy by not contemplating alternatives while it is still possible. And the challenge for Democrats is to figure out a way to make voters on both sides of this divide comfortable and happy with whoever emerges from Chicago with the nomination this summer. Right now, that is looking like an uphill climb, especially after the president's team will have to continue debating his basic viability after the 'uncommitted' imbroglio in Michigan.

*David Faris is an associate professor of political science at Roosevelt University and the author of* It's Time to Fight Dirty: How [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Can Build a Lasting Majority in American ***Politics***. *His writing has appeared in* The Week*,* The Washington Post*,* The New Republic*,* Washington Monthly *and more. You can find him on Twitter @davidmfaris.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2355269/right-man.jpg)

**Graphic**

The Right Man?

MANDEL NGAN/AFP via Getty Images

President Joe Biden speaks about the special counsel report in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on Feb 8, in a surprise last-minute addition to his schedule for the day.

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