



SRMG THINK: US Elections Weekly

Democrats Derailed by Debate | 5 July 2024



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President Joe Biden's debate performance in Georgia is still dominating the US presidential election campaign. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told the media in [Wednesday's noon briefing](#) that President Joe Biden is "absolutely not" considering withdrawing from the race after his performance on 27 June. Nevertheless, the Democrats are in disarray and the future of their candidate hangs in the balance.

The Republicans appear united and satisfied with the outcome of the debate, not only in terms of poll numbers, but in how Biden's poor showing has taken over the media cycle. They are happy to sit back and allow the focus to be on Biden's (lack of) vigour and mental acuity – instead of Trump's own shortcomings.

Will He Stay or Will He Go?

Despite pressure from the media, political pundits, and some of his allies and donors to withdraw, Biden has made it clear he will not be leaving the race. "Let me say this as clearly as I possibly can ... I'm not leaving. I'm in this race to the end and we're going to win," [he told campaign staffers](#).

But the dam that the Democratic Party built around the President following the debate is showing cracks, with dissension emerging within his own party over whether he should continue. The US media is reporting that his inner coterie is telling him to stay the course.

Biden is expected to give a primetime interview to ABC News' George Stephanopoulos on Friday – the first since the debate.

The Democrats' Dilemma

Publicly, Biden still enjoys the support of party leaders, including Senator Chris Coons, the national co-chair of the President's re-election campaign and a fellow Delawarean. Democratic governors from around the country have expressed support for Biden and told the press that they have his back. This came after an evening meeting with both the President and Vice President Kamala Harris, who offered them reassurances that Biden is still the only candidate that can defeat Republican candidate Donald Trump.

But some senior Democrats have become critical privately and others have begun to speak out publicly.

Congressman Lloyd Doggett of Texas was the first serving Democrat to publicly call on the President to withdraw from the race. He was followed by Arizona's Congressman Raul Grijalva, who told the New York Times that the President should "shoulder the responsibility of keeping that seat – and part of that responsibility is to get out of this race." Former Speaker Nancy Pelosi during an interview with [MSNBC](#) defended Biden's debate performance, but did express reservations: "It is a legitimate question: Is this an episode or a condition?"

This shift in narrative from Party members took place around the same time the [New York Times](#) editorial board called on Biden to drop out "to serve his country." The Philadelphia Inquirer of Pennsylvania, a major newspaper in a must-win battleground state, echoed this message, as did the Atlanta Constitution. [The Washington Post](#) called on the president to do some "soul searching". The Boston Globe followed suit.

Damage Control

Several powerful Democratic governors met this week to discuss how to refocus the campaign away from Biden's debate performance and towards the threat that they believe Trump poses to US interests.

The Democrats are afraid that trying to replace the President will be chaotic and split the Party, disrupting the upcoming August convention. Prominent Democratic Congressman [Jamie Raskin](#) stated that "whether he's [Biden] the candidate or someone else is the candidate, he's going to be the keynote speaker at our convention. He will be the figure that we rally around to move forward." To many, this sounds like a consolation to the President as thinking within the party moves towards what other options might be available.

Follow the Money

One indicator to watch is the position of major Democrat donors. Several prominent donors – including [Whitney Tilson](#), Abigail Disney, Gideon Stein, Damon Lindelof, Ari Emanuel and [Reed Hastings](#) – have called on Biden to withdraw, with some warning they will withhold funding until he is replaced on the ticket.

Shortly after the debate, Reid Hoffman publicly supported Biden in an email sent to his donor network. Another significant donor and fundraiser Susie Buell also continued to back the President – although her husband and fellow donor Mark Buell suggested that the Party needed to conduct a risk assessment and that the ultimate decision would be driven by data. Reid Hoffman publicly supported Biden in an email sent to his donor network. Another significant donor and fundraiser Susie Buell also continued to back the President – although her husband and fellow donor Mark Buell suggested that the Party needed to conduct a risk assessment and that the ultimate decision would be driven by data.

What the Polls are Saying

The latest [New York Times/Siena](#) poll puts Trump ahead of Biden by six percentage points. It also reveals that since the debate, 74% of voters view Biden as too old for the job.

A new poll conducted by [Reuters/Ipsos](#) shows that the Democrat candidate has drawn even with Trump since the debate. Each registered 40% support among registered voters, a change from the pre-debate poll that saw Trump ahead by 2 percentage points (41–39). But the same poll showed that one in three Democrats thought that Biden should withdraw from the campaign.

A [CNN](#) poll found out that 75% of Americans think that "Democrats have a better chance of winning with another candidate."

The Biden campaign's polling shows that Biden supporters have remained onside following the debate, including in battleground states. However, a [confidential polling memo](#) from OpenLabs – a non-profit that conducts polling and message testing for several Democratic outfits – obtained by Puck News reported findings that showed that states where Biden was in the lead are now possible wins for Trump. These include New Mexico, Virginia and New Hampshire. A separate poll conducted by St Anselm College/WMUR showed that Trump is already ahead, although only slightly, in favourability in New Hampshire – which has been won by a Democrat in every election bar one since 1992.

Trump is on a Winning Streak

Former President Donald Trump had a great week. He not only won the debate, but the Supreme Court also ruled that former presidents enjoy broad immunity for official acts. The indictment detailing Trump's alleged attempts to overturn the 2020 election results will now be reviewed through due process. In the short term, the Supreme Court ruling has likely pushed out any trial date until after the November elections.

The Supreme Court decision was the first of several developments expected to propel the Republican candidate further ahead in the elections. Justice Juan Merchan on 2 July postponed sentencing Trump in the felony charges for falsifying business records until September – after the Republican convention. Trump's lawyers are also now drawing on the Supreme Court decision to try to overturn his conviction in this case.

What To Look Out For

- Biden is expected to give a primetime interview to ABC News' George Stephanopoulos on 5 July.
- The Republican National Convention will be held in Milwaukee on 15–18 July.