

# ANALYSIS: Trump Indictment Throws 2024 Election Into Chaos

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## Politics



Former President Donald Trump disembarks his plane in Aberdeen, Scotland, on May 1, 2023. (Jeff J Mitchell/Getty Images)

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### *News Analysis*

The indictment of former President Donald Trump on charges related to his unauthorized possession of classified documents has introduced a wild card into the 2024 presidential campaign, all but ensuring another election marked by allegations of wrongdoing against a major candidate.

A day after the June 8 announcement that the Department of Justice (DOJ) would pursue criminal charges, supporters and detractors of the former president took their predictable sides.

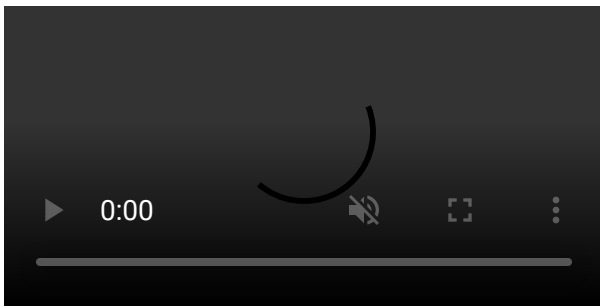
Left uncomfortably in the middle were Republican candidates for the 2024 presidential nomination who faced the choice between directly attacking their strongest opponent or soft-pedaling to avoid angering his formidable base of loyalists.

For Trump, no stranger to controversy, the indictment could be both a blessing and a curse.

## The Trump Bump

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The indictment both helps and hurts Trump, according to some political strategists. It will likely energize his core supporters but may also impose limitations on his schedule and ability to speak publicly about the matter.



“It’s a great way for Trump to fundraise and tighten up his base,” legal and political analyst Andrew Lieb told The Epoch Times. “In fact, we learned about the indictment because Trump told us, and then his super PAC told us.”

“In a macro sense, it’s going to be very, very disruptive as judges, particularly federal judges, could care less what obligations Trump has,” Lieb added. “So he’s going to have to work around their schedule. And there’s likely going to be a confidentiality order.”

In the short term, the indictment is unlikely to harm Trump’s support, according to political strategist and organizer Amani Wells-Onyioha.

“During this time, we’ve seen Trump in the news almost every day over allegations, he’s been the first former president to face criminal charges, and yet, he still leads in the polls by a wide margin,” Wells-Onyioha told The Epoch Times.

“Even if he is charged and behind bars, he could still theoretically be our President,” Wells-Onyioha added. “Given all this, we can expect Trump to continue his campaign for 2024, and we’re unlikely to see any major drop in his polling.”



Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie looks on prior to a game between the Indianapolis Colts and the Dallas Cowboys at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Dec. 4, 2022. (Richard Rodriguez/Getty Images)

However, the indictment has produced cracks in what had previously been an impregnable red wall of support by the Republican party.

## **Wounded Warrior**

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A number of congressional Republicans have remained supportive of Trump, using the indictment as an occasion to attack their primary political opponent, President Joe Biden.

“Joe Biden has used his Justice Department ... tonight to indict his top political opponent, Trump. He has trampled the rule of law to benefit himself. He has led the country into profound danger,” Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) wrote on Twitter.

“This is our two-tiered Justice system on full display,” Sen. Bill Hagerty (R-Tenn.) wrote on Twitter. “The Biden DOJ buries investigations of President Biden and his family while it charges his political rivals. Making America look like a banana republic is incredibly irresponsible.”

Among Republicans running against Trump for the 2024 presidential nomination, the political calculus is different. Although Trump is their opponent, attacking him risks alienating his formidable political base.

Two candidates have been willing to take that risk.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie said Trump's legal problems were "self-inflicted wounds," making him a poor choice in 2024.

"Return the documents and stop doing this," Christie said in a televised June 9 interview on Fox News. "Why do you have to be the center of negative attention all the time? Why do you have to be angry all the time? And that's what Donald Trump has done."

Referring to the federal indictment, Christie added, "That's the weight that Donald Trump will have to carry if he's the nominee into a general election in November. And why do we want to take that risk?"

"Donald Trump's actions—from his willful disregard for the Constitution to his disrespect for the rule of law—should not define our nation or the Republican Party," former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson said in a [statement](#) on June 8. "This reaffirms the need for Donald Trump to respect the office and end his campaign."

Other candidates have been hesitant to attack Trump directly, preferring to vent their wrath on the DOJ.



Ron DeSantis speaks at the Convention Center in Tampa, Fla., on Nov. 8, 2022. (Giorgio Viera/AFP via Getty Images)

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, polling second behind Trump in the primary race, passed up the opportunity to criticize the frontrunner.

“The weaponization of federal law enforcement represents a mortal threat to a free society. We have for years witnessed an uneven application of the law depending upon political affiliation. Why so zealous in pursuing Trump yet so passive about Hillary or Hunter?” DeSantis wrote on Twitter, vowing to hold the DOJ accountable if elected.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who served under Trump as ambassador to the United Nations, also attacked the system rather than her former boss.

“This is not how justice should be pursued in our country,” she wrote on Twitter. “The American people are exhausted by the prosecutorial overreach, double standards, and vendetta politics. It’s time to move beyond the endless drama and distractions.”

That’s a mistake, according to Lieb.

“It shows the weakness of the other Republican candidates,” Lieb said. “Trump is weak. He’s down now, and why aren’t they stomping on him? They’re showing that they’re second fiddle to his Alpha. They’re his Beta,” Lieb said.

Trump’s base may be enough to help him win the primary election, but it is not enough to win the general election, according to Lieb. In that case, other Republican candidates would need to capture the undecided votes within the party.

“The biggest hit I suspect [Trump will] take for this recent indictment is that he may lose the undecided Republican vote,” Wells-Onyioha said.

## **Shades of 2016**

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Ironically, the charges against Trump are similar to allegations made against his 2016 opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, for her use of email. Both center on the mishandling of classified government documents.

Clinton had used a private email server during her tenure at the State Department, a practice she said had been used by predecessors due to the poor performance of the Department’s email server.





Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speaks during a panel at the Vital Voices Global Festival in Washington on May 5, 2023. (Madalina Vasiliu/The Epoch Times)

Trump and others saw this as careless at best and criminal at worst. Her actions could have allowed hackers to access government documents, they said, and may have violated the law by improperly storing classified material.

The FBI opened an investigation into the handling of Clinton's emails in July 2015. One year later, then-FBI Director James Comey announced that no charges would be filed.

By that time, Trump had nicknamed Clinton "Crooked Hillary," and the chant "Lock her up" became a rallying cry among his supporters.

Comey announced that the probe into Clinton's emails had been reopened on October 28, 2016, reigniting the controversy less than two weeks before the election. Prior to that announcement, Clinton had led Trump in national polls by 5.9 percent. A week later, her lead had dropped by 3 percent.

No charges were brought against Clinton.

Former Vice President Mike Pence summarized the likely fallout of the indictment in a June 9 radio interview with Hugh Hewitt.

"I think this is going to be terribly divisive for the country," he said.

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