

The Inverted Congressional Coalitions Behind Biden’s 2024 Withdrawal and Harris’s Nomination*

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Abstract

Democratic members of Congress were the key constituency that pressured President Biden to withdraw from the 2024 presidential election and quickly consolidated Harris’s nomination. But were the forces pushing for Biden’s withdrawal also responsible for the near-instant consolidation behind Kamala Harris? An event history analysis of 263 Democratic members of Congress shows that the two outcomes followed separate calculi. Collective incentives mattered far more than personal incentives in driving Biden opposition: Biden’s declining poll numbers drove congressional opposition, while personal policy alignment and CBC membership shaped who stayed silent; personal electoral incentives show no independent influence. Harris’s consolidation followed different rules: members more aligned with Biden’s administration, in safer seats, and not facing election endorsed Harris fastest. In short, it was not a palace coup; collective viability largely drove calls for Biden to step down, but a different mix of individual incentives explains the rally behind his successor.

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The nomination campaign for the Democratic Party in 2024 was anything but expected. Despite facing public calls from elite members of his own party to not seek a second term as early as 2022, President Biden's nomination had regained momentum after Democrats outperformed expectations in the 2022 midterms. Biden would go on to handily win all the primary contests except American Samoa, and 87% of the vote. Yet within four weeks of a disastrous debate performance against Donald Trump on June 27—a period that also included an assassination attempt on Trump—Biden withdrew his candidacy and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris.

What led Biden to withdraw has been the subject of many books and articles in the popular press, positing everything from donor flight to a collapse in public support to elite pressure following the debate (e.g., Allen and Parnes 2025; Tapper and Thompson 2025; Silver 2024). A large portion of that elite pressure came from Congress. Although Biden's team would deny it (Allen et al. 2024), public calls from the Democratic congressional delegation were a prominent force fueling doubts about Biden's status. When Texas Representative Lloyd Doggett first publicly called for Biden to withdraw just five days after the debate, it was the beginning of what became a growing stream of congressional opposition. Journalistic accounts describe Congressional Democrats as initially a mixed coalition—concerned but not yet convinced Biden should step aside following the debate. That coalition became more oppositional as events transpired and the Biden campaign failed to reassure doubters (Allen et al. 2024; Tapper and Thompson 2025).

But how was a presidential nominee essentially replaced within this short time? Why did some Democrats in Congress publicly express concern or even call for Biden's withdrawal, while others did not? It is clear that the first presidential debate set in motion a public discussion that ultimately convinced Biden to withdraw. But it is unclear what forces precipitated that call for change among legislators and whether those same forces also gave Harris the nomination.

Claims that Biden was forced out and lost the nomination (e.g., Silver 2024) ignore some crucial details. Unlike LBJ's decision in 1968, there was no clear viable opposition seeking the nomination. Biden was nearly certain of holding his delegates absent stepping down, and he had reportedly never consulted his convention whip team before his July 21 announcement (Martin 2024). There is simply no evidence his decision was a calculated preemptive maneuver to avoid a convention battle. Instead, reports suggest Biden withdrew because he was

convinced that continuing would require leading a fractured party that would burden Congressional Democrats and offer little chance of winning (Allen and Parnes 2025; Lee, Gangel, and Zeleny 2024; Tapper and Thompson 2025). We propose studying his withdrawal not as a lost nomination contest, but as a rare instance of a secured nominee stepping aside because party leaders communicated a lack of sufficient support.¹

The central question we ask is whether Congressional Democrats were acting out of collective or personal incentives during this process. Did they go public because the debate genuinely changed the party's fortunes—lowering Biden's viability in ways that newly justified opposition—or because it merely provided occasion for opposition that was already latent, giving elites the public cover to voice doubts they already held or score political points. In a February *New York Times* audio essay, Ezra Klein (2024) alludes to many insiders already harboring private doubts about Biden's chances and fitness for four more years, with any opportunity to say so publicly denied by Biden's energizing State of the Union performance on March 7. The June 27 debate may have reopened that door. But did it open it because the party's chances subsequently changed, or merely because it was finally ajar?

We address these questions using an event history framework applied to all 263 Democratic members of Congress serving between the debate and the DNC filing deadline. We first analyze who chose to publicly call for Biden to withdraw or express significant doubt, and then, second, their choice to publicly endorse Harris as the party's nominee. Using time-varying measures of Biden's electoral viability, we evaluate how much members of Congress were driven by their own policy or electoral incentives as opposed to their collective, shared incentives of losing the presidency. We then examine if the same coalition who pushed Biden out quickly rallied behind Harris—or whether a different configuration of interests generated consolidation around the new nominee.

Our results clearly suggest the push for Biden's exit was driven by collective incentives to maintain Democratic control of the presidency. Democratic members of Congress who had voted against Biden administration bills were more likely to call for Biden to withdraw, but the prevalence of opposition is largely explained by Biden's declining poll numbers following the debate and then again after the failed Trump assassination attempt. Surprisingly, personal

1. Other examples include Graham Platner's withdrawal after winning the 2026 Democratic Senate nomination in Maine (Wagner, Lerer, and Glueck 2026) and Robert Torricelli's withdrawal after winning the 2002 Democratic Senate nomination in New Jersey.

electoral factors show no relationship to calls for Biden’s withdrawal. In contrast, the rush to endorse Harris was largely driven by each member’s personal policy positions and electoral incentives. Safe, junior members who voted in greater agreement with the Biden administration endorsed Harris fastest, and electorally vulnerable and senior members were much less eager to support her. In contrast to a palace coup, the coalition that pushed for Biden’s withdrawal was not just a different wing of the party than the coalition that pushed for Harris’s nomination, it involved a different calculus as well.

Going Public Against Your Own President

The dominant contemporary view holds that party elites maintain decisive influence over nomination outcomes by converging on a candidate during the invisible primary period (Cohen et al. 2008; Steger 2008).² Aggregate endorsement counts are strong predictors of primary vote share, fundraising, and media attention, representing the “autonomous judgments of a relatively small world of party members” rather than reactions to mass public opinion (Cohen et al. 2008, 311).

An alternative view holds that nominations are more dynamic and interactive, with elite influence consequential only *conditional* on public support—such that momentum, viability signals, and shifting mass opinion also shape who leads and who follows (Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988; Norrander 2006). Prior work in this tradition has shown that structural changes in campaign finance, digital technology, and early-state dynamics have progressively weakened elite coordination by opening alternative pathways for candidates to build viability outside the party network: web presence allowed insurgent candidates to bypass endorsement-dependent gatekeepers (Christenson, Smidt, and Panagopoulos 2014), Super PACs enabled individual megadonors to sustain long-shot candidates against establishment preferences (Christenson and Smidt 2014; Corrado 2012),³ and early-state momentum generated independent media and donor feedback that elite signals alone could not override (Bartels 1988; Mutz 1995; Dowdle, Adkins, and Steger 2009; Christenson and Smidt 2012; Smidt and

2. Cohen et al. (2016) subsequently note the significance of recent changes in media, fundraising, and party factions for modern nominations and outsider candidacies in particular.

3. The broader “money primary”—the competition for financial support ahead of any voting—had been identified and examined well before the Citizens United era (e.g., Goff 2004; Adkins and Dowdle 2002).

Christenson 2012; Scala 2003).⁴ The tension between these perspectives structures the empirical questions we ask here.

What this aggregate-level literature does not fully address is *who* within this world of party members actually chooses to participate, and why. Anderson (2013) takes up this micro-level question, arguing that members of Congress weigh both collective party incentives and personal strategic calculations when deciding whether to go public. On the collective side, members share an interest in nominating a candidate who can win the general election and preserve the party's ideological brand. On the personal side, decisions to lead the nomination process carry risks: electoral blowback from constituents, premature commitment to a losing candidate, or intra-party conflict.

We believe this framework speaks directly to the 2024 Democratic context, though with important differences. The calculation facing Congressional Democrats was not whether to endorse a challenger in a standard invisible primary but whether to publicly oppose a secured incumbent—an action with considerably higher personal and political costs. Biden commanded institutional party loyalty and the levers of incumbency. If Biden were to be the nominee, those who opposed him risked blame in a loss and even punishment in a win. Going public against him required not only personal incentive but a threshold of perceived collective necessity. The 2024 case may therefore represent a more consequential and costly form of elite participation.

We organize our theoretical expectations around the two competing sets of expectations based on legislators acting out of personal or collective incentives. The **personal opportunity hypothesis** views the debate as a focal event enabling latent opposition to surface among members who either had personal policy or electoral incentives to distance themselves from Biden. In contrast, the **collective viability hypothesis** holds that Biden's poor debate performance primarily provoked opposition because it genuinely altered the party's electoral prospects in ways that collectively crossed a threshold for Democratic members—reflecting collectively-minded elites acting on new information about party viability.

Personal Opportunity and Cross-Pressures

News reports before the debate suggest legislators were already concerned about Biden's age and fitness to both campaign against Trump and even serve as

4. Media coverage shapes not only voter perceptions but campaign contributions and press strategy directly (Flowers, Haynes, and Crespin 2003).

President. And one possible explanation of the reaction to Biden's disastrous and concerning debate performance (and the massive news storm that followed) was that it provided a focal point for voicing those doubts. It gave both a justifiable reason to oppose Biden that reduced the political costs, and (since it was a dominant news story) it provided significant exposure and personal benefit to Democratic members of Congress who went public.

We recognize different types of personal incentives could promote Biden opposition. First, the pursuit of reelection is often a primary explanation for the behavior of members of Congress (Mayhew 1974). Legislators are more likely to bear the costs of publicly opposing their party's nominee if they perceive it as necessary for improving their electoral circumstances.

H1 (Electoral Incentives): Electorally vulnerable Democratic MoCs were more likely to publicly call for Biden to step aside.

Being on the ballot and in a competitive race makes the costs of a losing nominee immediate and concrete (Fenno 1978). And officials in swing districts need to distance themselves from an unpopular administration or an administration more extreme than the voters in one's district.

Beyond electoral calculations, legislators are also motivated by policy goals (Fenno 1973), and presidential nominees matter for the party's ideological direction (Bawn et al. 2012; Anderson 2013). Democratic members of Congress already had clear knowledge of how well the incumbent Biden administration was helping or hurting their own policy goals. And that recent track record of agreement likely informed lawmaker expectations of whether continuing to support Biden supported those policy goals.

H2 (Policy Incentives): Democratic MoCs who more often opposed Biden administration policy were more likely to publicly call for Biden to step aside.

There are various ways to characterize intra-party policy differences and influence. We take a largely agnostic approach as to characterizing them and focus simply on presidential support or agreement scores from the 2023 year.

We also recognize that these personal incentives are not uniform and other contextual factors provided cross-pressures to Democrats who may have otherwise benefited from publicly opposing Biden. Black legislators had multiple reasons to be silent given Biden's association with President Obama, the decisive role blacks played in securing his winning 2020 coalition and the anticipated

role of Harris as the most likely replacement. Senior Democratic members of Congress, by contrast, were more likely to have sufficient stature and credibility to bear the costs of going public against a sitting president.

When the Party's Chances Change

In contrast to these personal considerations, the collective viability hypothesis emphasizes party viability with Biden the nominee as a primary factor—how much the public's reaction to the debate changed Biden's chances of winning and losing the presidency to Trump. Members of Congress may have been willing to bear the costs of public opposition in a last ditch effort to defeat Trump as Biden's victory became increasingly unlikely.

As was widely recognized, and as we will show, Biden's polling numbers versus Trump declined following the debate, both nationally and in battleground states. And these numbers worsened further after the failed assassination attempt on Trump and the Republican National Convention.

In standard nomination settings, collective incentives drive elites toward viable candidates (Cohen et al. 2008; Anderson 2013). In 2024, the equivalent incentive was to push out a candidate assessed as no longer viable. Following Cohen et al.'s (2008) finding that members respond to electoral prospects when making endorsement decisions, we expect dynamic changes in Biden's chances to drive the timing of congressional opposition.

H3 (Viability): Declines in Biden's electoral viability increased the probability that Democratic MoCs publicly called for Biden to step aside.

Moreover, collective incentives likely explain why Congressional Democrats would push to replace Biden without knowing if the eventual nominee would be fundamentally different from the administration's policy or record of performance. From a policy-demander standpoint, there was no clear policy benefit to opposing Biden's nomination without firm knowledge of whether the replacement would differ from the current administration's record and priorities. And journalistic accounts suggest that private efforts to convince Biden to step aside largely focused on the collective costs to the party.

Support for H3 over H1 and H2 constitutes the core of the collective viability hypothesis. The hypotheses, however, are not mutually exclusive: the most theoretically informative finding would be that individual-level factors emerge as substantively meaningful factors *once* viability dynamics are accounted for—suggesting that a confluence of individual and collective fault lines drove op-

position rather than simply providing opportunity for those already inclined to oppose Biden.

Was the Harris Endorsement a Coordinated Outcome?

After Biden withdrew and endorsed Vice President Harris, almost the entire congressional Democratic caucus endorsed her within 72 hours. This swing was so dramatic that Republicans even claimed the events were evidence of a coordinated, coercive coup that took power away from a vulnerable President (e.g., Yourish and Gamio 2024).

We treat the coordination and timing of Harris endorsements as an open question and a valuable complementary analysis. Did the same collective incentives that drove opposition to Biden also drive quick convergence on his successor, or did the tide of Harris endorsements follow a different logic? We use the same individual-level covariates as in the Biden analysis to examine this question through a parallel survival model. If Biden's opposition was a coordinated and strategic effort to replace him with Harris, then we should expect some evidence that these endorsements exhibit a shared pattern of motivating factors.

Congressional Opposition to Biden

We study the 263 Democrats actively serving in Congress from June 27, the date of the first presidential debate, to July 27, the DNC's deadline for candidates to file after Biden stepped aside.⁵ For each, we recorded the nature and timing of their public statements, cross-referenced across tracker pages maintained by the *Wall Street Journal*, NPR, and the *New York Times* (Han and Fung 2024; Kim et al. 2024; Stamm and Mollica 2024).⁶

We code a MoC as opposing Biden's nomination if they made public statements either clearly calling for him to step aside or explicitly expressing significant concern and doubt about the campaign's viability. We identify 38 MoCs who made public calls for Biden to step aside and another 23 who expressed significant doubts without calling for his withdrawal.⁷

5. We include the independent senators King, Manchin, Sanders, and Sinema. This excludes Sheila Jackson Lee, who died in July, but includes Bob Menendez, who did not resign until August.

6. This research relies exclusively on publicly available data, including public statements by elected officials, congressional voting records, and publicly available polling and prediction market data. No human participants were involved and no IRB review was required.

7. The *Wall Street Journal* did not consider Gluesenkamp Perez's July 11 statement as a

We combine these two groups of opposing statements as similar instances of MoCs publicly opposing Biden in the event history models that follow; all other MoCs are coded as not having gone public against his nomination. We believe that this coding is justified in the sense that some of the legislators who actively sought to convince Biden to step aside were those, like Nancy Pelosi, who simply expressed concern publicly.⁸

We focus on three sets of factors. The first two are time-constant, tapping the personal opportunity hypothesis; the third is time-varying and directly taps the collective viability hypothesis.⁹ *Personal and Policy characteristics* include whether a legislator was in the Congressional Black Caucus (*CBC*), whether they were the *Senior* half of legislators in office, and their presidential support scores from the 2023 session (*Biden Agreement*).¹⁰ *Electoral characteristics* include whether the MoC was *Up for Election* in 2024, the pre-debate *Cook Political Rating* of their contest (from safe to toss-up or worse), and the *2020 Biden-Trump Margin* in the member's district or state.

Table 1 presents the marginal rates observed in publicly stating opposition or concern by these variables. The associations largely support their expected directions, but the relationships vary in strength. Across all electoral measures, those more subject to electoral pressures exhibit greater rates of public statements questioning Biden's nomination. Nearly half of legislators running in a toss-up or worse contest made some sort of oppositional statement. Congressional Black Caucus legislators publicly expressed concern at nearly one quarter the rate of legislators not in the CBC, and senior Democratic legislators were more likely to make public statements. Differences by 2020 Biden-Trump margin and by years in office are comparatively weak.

Finally, we use two different measures to test for what influence Biden's changing viability had on party collective incentives that change daily. Both of these were selected more so for their prominence as independent, known mea-

call to withdraw from the nomination, though it called for Biden to step down from serving as President. Jared Golden's op-ed declaring no confidence in Biden but stating the outcome did not matter because Trump would win regardless is not coded as a call to step down.

8. In a couple of circumstances, a legislator first expressed concern then opposition. In those instances we go by the later date since it represents the more costly statement.

9. Full variable construction details are provided in the online appendix.

10. The choice of the Biden agreement presidential support score allows us to be agnostic of whether opposition was a function of ideological distance or direction; alternative results using DW-NOMINATE first-dimension scores are presented in the Online Appendix.

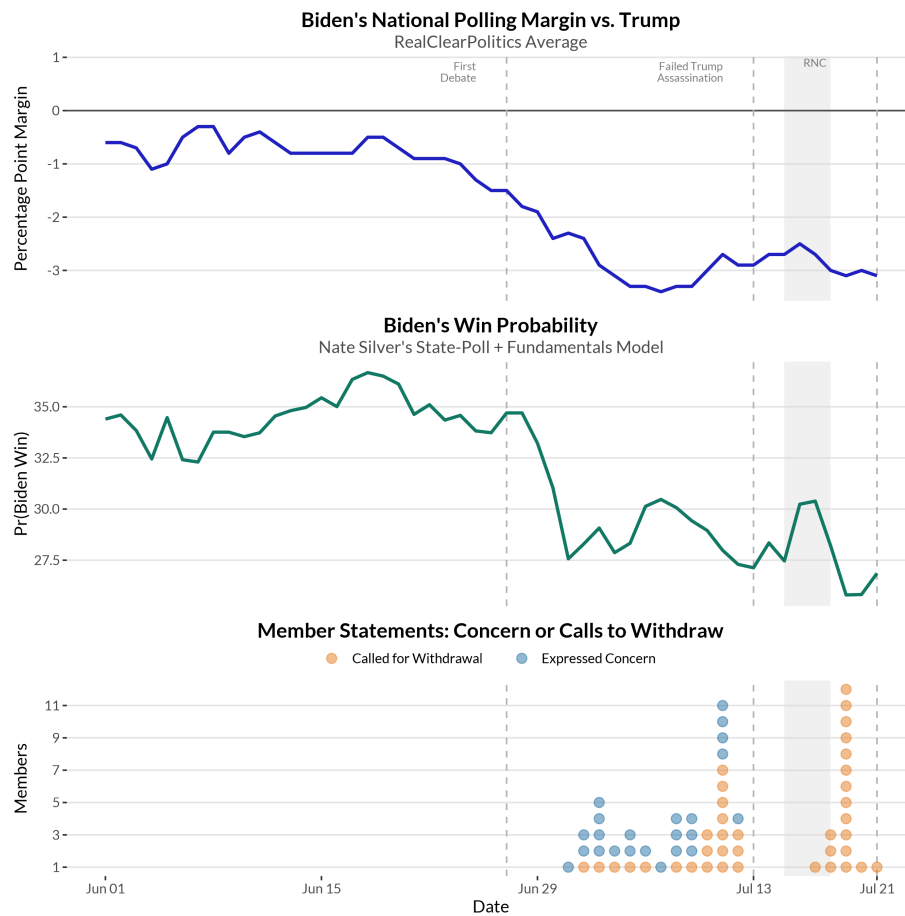
Table 1. Marginal Rates of Public Calls for Biden to Step Aside or Expressing Concern

Variable	Value	% w/Public Statement
Election Status	Running	24.0
	Not Running	20.0
Cook Rating (among 208 running)	Safe D	22.2
	Likely/Lean	25.0
	Toss-up or worse	46.2
2020 Biden-Trump Margin	Bottom half	25.8
	Top half	20.6
Biden Agreement Score	Bottom Half (≤ 96.2)	26.0
	Top Half (> 96.2)	19.3
Congressional Black Caucus	No	27.4
	Yes	7.3
Years in Office	Senior Half	25.9
	Junior Half	20.3

asures of a candidate’s standing among politicians, as opposed to their accuracy as measures of public sentiment. The first variable focuses on the impact of the debate in the states and what that meant for the Electoral College. Specifically, we use Nate Silver’s daily probability estimate of Biden’s chances of winning the general election based on fundamentals and state poll averages (*Biden’s Chances*). Second, we tap Biden’s national polling performance against Trump by including Biden’s deficit compared to Trump in the RealClearPolitics national presidential polling average (*Biden Margin*).

Figure 1 illustrates the timeline of MoC statements on the bottom as they track with these estimates of Biden’s performance along with prominent campaign events of that time period. Although both measures show Biden was already running behind Trump prior to the debate, his standing became considerably worse following the debate. Both series show Biden’s performance slightly improving after the initial drop, but then dropping back again to previous low levels following the Republican National Convention. Notably, MoC statements on Biden went silent immediately following the failed assassination

Figure 1. Observed Timeline of Biden’s Viability and Congressional Caucus Statements



attempt on Trump.

We use a discrete-time, logistic regression event history model with a natural cubic spline (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004) to test what explains going public against Biden. The event history framework focuses not just on *which* legislators went public, but also *when* that statement was made.

Who Went Public, and When

Table 2 presents the results of four regression models. Positive coefficients indicate that a variable is associated with a higher rate of calling for Biden to step aside; negative coefficients the opposite. We exclude the constant, weekend

Table 2. Which factors explain Members of Congress calling for Biden to step aside?

Variable	Model			
	Personal	Political	Viability	Full
CBC	-1.399** (.519)	-1.391** (.536)	-1.403** (.520)	-1.397** (.536)
Legislative Agreement with Biden	-0.044** (.014)	-0.040* (.017)	-0.046** (.014)	-0.041* (.017)
Senior Member	0.364 (.269)	0.376 (.271)	0.376 (.270)	0.389 (.272)
Up for Election		0.253 (.387)		0.257 (.388)
Cook Rating		0.016 (.201)		0.014 (.202)
2020 Margin		-0.002 (.009)		-0.002 (.009)
Biden's Chances (Nate Silver)			-0.368** (.127)	-0.368** (.127)
Biden Margin (RealClearPolitics)			-1.076* (.492)	-1.076* (.492)
Democratic Legislators	263	263	263	263
Observations	5702	5702	5702	5702
Log-likelihood	-312.747	-312.462	-303.763	-303.475
aROC	.741	.745	.779	.779

Logit model coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. $*p \leq .05$, $**p \leq .01$, two-tailed test. Estimates for constant, the weekend dummy variable, and the two natural cubic duration splines not presented.

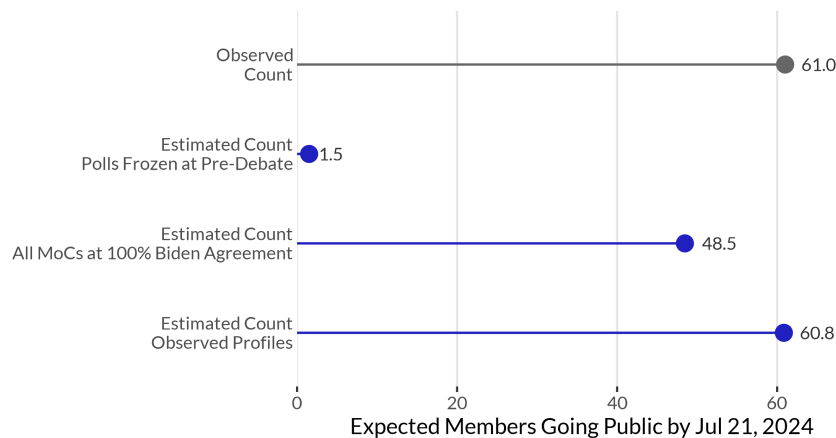
dummy, and spline coefficient estimates.

Model 1 tests personal and policy characteristics alone. Two factors emerge clearly: CBC membership is strongly and significantly associated with a *lower* rate of going public, and higher Biden Agreement scores are associated with lower rates of opposition. Both are consistent with the personal opportunity hypothesis in the negative direction — members with cross-pressures from their relationship to Biden and the Black political coalition, and members more aligned with Biden's policy record, were significantly less likely to go public. Model 2 adds electoral context variables. None of the electoral measures achieves significance: being up for election, Cook rating, and 2020 margin all show no

independent effect once personal and policy factors are controlled. And a comparison of the log-likelihood and area under the ROC curve (aROC) shows there is no clear improvement in model fit. These results provide little support for H1 (Electoral Incentives) — personal electoral vulnerability does not independently drive opposition.

Electoral pressures become much more relevant when we consider the party's collective viability. Model 3 includes the Electoral College driven *Biden's Chances* measure from Nate Silver and the average *Biden Margin* vs Trump in RealClear-Politics tracking of national polls along with the personal characteristic variables (Model 1). Two results are clear. First, both coefficients for Biden's campaign performance are significant. As Biden's chances of winning the presidency worsened following the debate, public statements calling for him to step aside or expressing concern about his ability to win increased. Second, the improvement in the log-likelihood and the aROC shows that collective viability factors significantly improve model fit and are not simply explaining the duration dependence already accounted for by the model splines. Model 4 includes all covariates and shows that the coefficient estimates hold across all specifications.

Figure 2. Comparison of Personal vs. Collective Contributions to Biden Opposition



Although legislators more at odds with the Biden administration were indeed more likely to go public against Biden, personal characteristics do not explain the volume of congressional opposition; what mattered was the sustained deterioration in Biden's polling that followed the debate. This is made clear by

Figure 2, which compares the expected number of MoCs going public under two counterfactuals. First, we estimated the predicted count if Biden's viability was kept unchanged from its pre-debate levels. Compared to the 61 members who made public statements of concern or opposition to Biden, we estimate that only about 1.5 statements would have been made if Biden's chances had stayed constant. In comparison, we allow polls to vary, but calculate the expected count if all Democratic MoCs had presidential support scores of 100. Even if all Democrats were in 100% agreement with the Biden administration, collective viability considerations still dominate; at least 48 Democratic MoCs still would have made a public statement based on his declining poll performance. To the extent personal, intra-party divisions mattered for pushing Biden to exit, it was only evident because he was deemed a collective risk to the party.

Individual comparisons further illustrate how differences by policy alignment and race were greatly enhanced by the viability effect. Take the case of two MoCs representing districts Trump won in 2020, Marcy Kaptur of Ohio and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington. Although both were very vulnerable, Kaptur was a stronger supporter of Biden (87%) and never made a public statement. Gluesenkamp Perez's support score was much worse (54%), and she made a public statement opposing Biden on July 11. Those differences in Biden support translate into Kaptur having nearly a 40% chance of going public over the days observed compared to Perez's 78% chance. However, if the polls had remained fixed at Biden's pre-debate levels, then those differences would have shrunk to only 3% for Perez and only 1% for Kaptur.¹¹

MoCs with lower Biden support scores were more likely to go public as viability fell; but CBC members remained significantly more likely to not speak even as viability deteriorated. Don Davis of North Carolina was running in a 50-50 district and had a noticeably low rate of agreement with the Biden administration (61%). But, because he was a member of the CBC, his cumulative risk of publicly opposing Biden was at 25% instead of 68%. If Biden's poll numbers had not declined, then Davis's CBC affiliation would only have lowered his risk from 2% to less than 1%.

Overall, our results tell a clear story. As Biden's viability continued to decline after the first debate, the failed Trump assassination attempt, and the Republican National Convention, the cascade of congressional opposition grew.

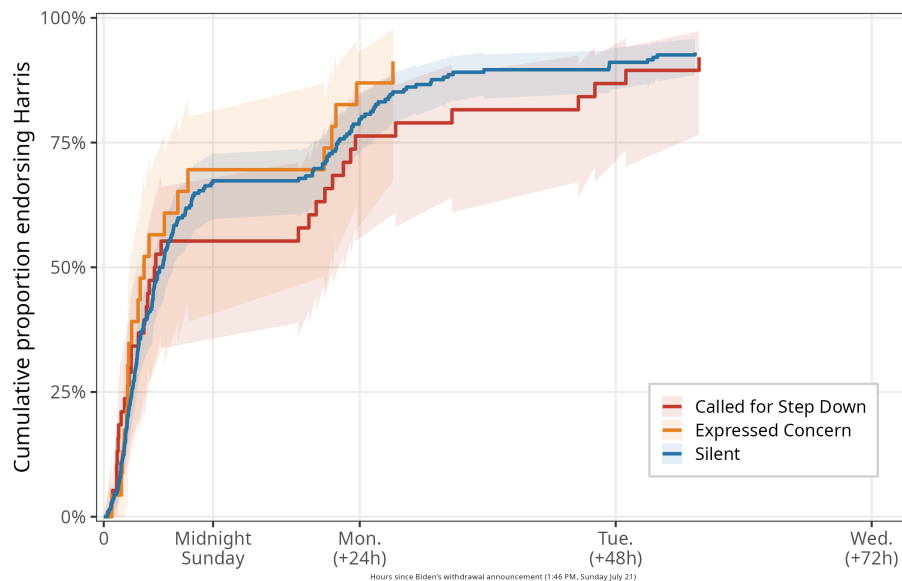
11. These estimates represent cumulative hazards of opposition occurring over the observation window.

Policy alignment and racial cross-pressures moderated *who* among the coalition went public first, but the volume of opposition largely reflected collective desires for the Democratic Party to not surrender the presidency.

The Rush to Harris

The distinct nature of the forces driving opposition to Biden is made clearer when we evaluate how these factors explain support for Harris’s nomination. After Biden withdrew and endorsed Harris on July 21, she essentially secured the nomination by that day’s end and sealed up most endorsements within 48 hours (Goldmacher 2024). This rapid consolidation raises a natural question: did this reflect a pre-existing coordinated plan? Were the same forces that drove congressional opposition to Biden responsible for quick convergence on his successor, or did a different logic govern the Harris coalition?

Figure 3. Cumulative Harris Endorsement Rate by Hours Since Biden’s Withdrawal, Stratified by Prior Public Position on Biden



Cumulative proportion endorsing Harris by hours since Biden’s 1:46 PM withdrawal announcement on July 21. Lines stratified by members’ prior public position: called for Biden to step down (red), expressed concern (orange), or remained silent (blue). Shaded bands are 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3 provides an initial answer. It plots the cumulative proportion of Democratic legislators endorsing Harris over the 72 hours following Biden’s an-

nouncement, stratified by each member's prior public position on Biden. Strikingly, we fail to see any difference among these groups in their initial speed of supporting Harris. After the first 6 hours, Harris had majority support across each group, with those who remained silent on Biden being as supportive of Harris as those who called for Biden's withdrawal publicly (both around 55%). By day's end, however, the remaining members who had called for Biden to step aside were more hesitant in their support. Despite being some of the first to break publicly with Biden, this group was neither uniformly more opposed nor more supportive of Harris. They, like the rest of the coalition, faced a different calculus that made some quick to support and others less likely to fall in line a second time.¹²

Further tests demonstrate that what united MoCs to push for Biden to step aside was the reverse of what pushed the rush to endorse Harris. Table 3 presents the results of a multivariate Weibull model using the same individual-level covariates as the Biden analysis in Table 2.¹³

The results in some instances are a near-mirror image. Biden Agreement is now positive and strongly significant: members who voted more frequently with the Biden administration endorsed Harris *faster*, the opposite of their pattern in the Biden opposition model. But many other previously insignificant factors emerge as meaningful. Seniority, which had an insignificant positive relationship with Biden opposition, has a significant relationship in the opposite direction with Harris endorsement speed, with senior members significantly *slower* to endorse Harris. Members who were up for election in 2024 endorsed faster, and those in more competitive Cook-rated races endorsed more slowly. CBC membership shows no significant effect on Harris endorsement speed, again in contrast to its strong suppressive effect on Biden opposition. The one factor consistent across both models is the absence of a significant 2020 margin effect.¹⁴ The last column (Model 3) includes a dummy variable for those MoCs who publicly spoke against Biden. After accounting for these other factors, going

12. Appendix Figures 4 and 5 present complementary Sankey diagrams showing the flow from each member's prior public position on Biden and their Biden legislative agreement score, respectively, to whether they endorsed Harris by midnight on July 21. Both reinforce the pattern visible in Figure 3.

13. The more continuous nature of timing in this case and lack of varying calendar factors allow us to use the smooth parametric model.

14. The shape parameter indicates a declining hazard rate, which is consistent with the rapid rate of endorsements followed by longer holdouts.

Table 3. Which factors explain quickly endorsing Harris?

Variable	Model		
	1	2	3
CBC	0.246 (.157)	0.116 (.174)	0.161 (.175)
Legislative Agreement with Biden	0.067** (.013)	0.069** (.017)	0.072** (.017)
Senior Member	-0.470** (.135)	-0.483** (.136)	-0.526** (.138)
Up for Election		0.630** (.192)	0.639** (.192)
Cook Rating		-0.243* (.121)	-0.253* (.119)
2020 Margin		-0.002 (.004)	-0.002 (.004)
Went Public			0.293 (.159)
Constant	-7.849** (1.213)	-8.404** (1.634)	-8.698** (1.620)
Weibull Shape (p)	0.602** (.028)	0.617** (.028)	0.622** (.028)
Democratic Legislators	263	263	263
Endorsements Observed	245	245	245
Log-likelihood	-519.155	-511.309	-509.681

Weibull proportional-hazards regression explaining time (continuous in minutes) from Biden's withdrawal to each member's Harris endorsement. Coefficients (log relative-hazard) with standard errors in parentheses; * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, two-tailed test.

public is insignificant with a positive coefficient.

In summary, we see clear evidence of these two processes operating under separate and somewhat oppositional forces. Unlike the push for Biden to step down, in most respects the coalition of support behind Harris's nomination reflects a pattern of personal and electoral opportunity incentives. Junior members who were most aligned with Biden's policy record, up for election and in safe seats were quickest to consolidate behind Harris, while senior members most opposed to Biden's policy record, those not up for election, and those most electorally exposed moved more slowly. The intra-party coalition that expressed

concern and called for Biden's withdrawal did not consistently translate into similar enthusiasm for his successor.

Nominations from the Bottom Up

Popular accounts of Biden's withdrawal have emphasized donor flight, elite conspiracy, and coordinated factional pressure (Allen and Parnes 2025; Tapper and Thompson 2025; Silver 2024). Our findings correct key portions of that picture. The Democratic members of Congress who called for Biden to step aside were not acting on predetermined preferences waiting for a focal event to surface; they were largely responding to accumulating evidence that Biden could not win. Declines in poll-based measures of Biden's viability drove the timing and prevalence of congressional opposition far more than any stable feature of who legislators were or where they stood. Policy alignment with the Biden administration and CBC membership shaped who stayed silent longest, but the underlying tide was driven by information, not faction. Crucially, electoral vulnerability showed no independent effect—members in competitive races were no more likely to go public than those in safe seats once viability dynamics are accounted for. The debate alone was insufficient: what mattered was that Biden's poll numbers never recovered.

The Harris findings add an instant subsequent case of comparison that sharpens this interpretation rather than undercutting it. Many of the legislators most aggressive in pushing Biden out were the *slowest* to endorse his replacement. If 2024 had been a coordinated elite effort—a palace coup, as conservative commentators suggested—we would expect the same faction to have led both moves. Instead, the silent majority that had declined to call for Biden's withdrawal was quickest to make sure Harris was the replacement, while the vocal critics hung back. This inversion is precisely what a dynamic, evidence-responsive account would predict: different legislators reached their tipping points at different times for different reasons, and those reasons did not align neatly once the immediate pressure was resolved.

These findings matter beyond the 2024 outcome. Conventional wisdom has treated the Democratic switch from Biden to Harris as a strategic failure—evidence, in retrospect, that the party should have stuck with its incumbent (e.g., Silver 2024). But *ex post* electoral outcomes are a poor guide to whether elite action was rational at the time. The more fundamental question is what drove Congressional Democrats to act as they did: were they executing a coordinated elite strategy, or responding to accumulating public evidence that their

nominee could not win? Our findings suggest the latter. The switch was not manufactured from the top down by a faction with Harris in mind; it was pulled from the bottom up by a party watching its electoral prospects deteriorate in real time.

Moreover, the unique, national, and expedient nature of this switch pattern provides valuable ground to understand party elites and nominations. Our findings speak directly to a longstanding debate about the nature of nomination politics. Where the elite coordination view emphasizes the autonomous, early judgments of party insiders (Cohen et al. 2008; Steger 2008; Anderson 2013), a dynamic view holds that elites and mass opinion interact continuously throughout the campaign, with viability signals mediating between public information and elite action (Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988; Norrander 2006; Christenson and Smidt 2012, 2014, 2020). The 2024 evidence sits squarely on the dynamic side. The 2024 sequence—a secured incumbent pressured from office by a party responding to deteriorating poll numbers, followed by a near-instantaneous but incoherently assembled replacement nomination—may be the most consequential illustration yet of why a dynamic, public-responsive model of nomination politics captures something the elite coordination view cannot.¹⁵

Finally, although rarely as prominent, these forces likely extend beyond presidential nominations. Maine’s 2026 Democratic Senate primary offers a recent, striking complement: Graham Platner weathered a series of earlier scandals without significant elite defection while his polling remained strong, but faced near-universal calls to step aside only after a subsequent rape accusation emerged as his viability collapsed—with major institutional supporters, including the Senate Democratic campaign arm, withdrawing within hours (Wagner, Lerer, and Glueck 2026). The sequencing—scandal tolerated, withdrawal demanded only once the electoral math changed—is consistent with the role collective viability plays in driving elite support of nominees. Mapping the conditions under which viability signals override elite loyalty across office levels and electoral contexts remains an important agenda for future work.

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15. Of course, we do not claim that elite coordination is generally impossible, nor are we able to counter the theory for earlier elections.

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