

To: Interested Parties  
From: Michael Palmer, i360  
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Re: Trump Inevitability

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There has been a growing narrative in the past few months that former President Trump is going to be the nominee of the Republican Party in 2024 — and it's basically inevitable. This narrative is being pushed by left-leaning media outlets, political operatives, and the Trump campaign itself. While it is true that President Trump leads the GOP field in national polling and in the early states, there are many reasons why his nomination is far from inevitable.

The country is in a much different place than it was eight years ago. Voters of all stripes (including GOP primary voters) have a changed base of knowledge regarding the former president, and other candidates will most certainly treat him differently in the primary this time around. History is also an important factor to consider. Let's look at the four main reasons the inevitability argument doesn't hold water with seven months until the first vote is cast.

#### 1. Voters are open to alternatives.

When surveying GOP primary voters in the early states, understanding their current body of knowledge is important. Many of these voters haven't been following the daily political intrigue that grips Washington, and President Trump doesn't have the microphone that he held as president. So, for many primary voters, their current perspective is based on a remembrance of the Trump presidency, and they are comparing that memory to current conditions under the Biden administration. Additionally, the alternatives to Trump are just entering the race and have little to no name identification. Based on this, it should be no surprise that President Trump is leading the polls.

This lead certainly increased after the Manhattan District Attorney's indictment in late March, in what could be called a "sympathy bump." Before that, Gov. Ron DeSantis was very close to Trump in polling in the early states and back in November and December 2022, following the election, DeSantis was leading President Trump in the polls. *(It should be noted that the support for DeSantis at this time likely represents a generic Republican as his policy positions are not well known outside of Florida.)*

However, even among Trump's current supporters, many are open to alternatives. Even at his current polling levels, **41% of Trump supporters say they are open to supporting an alternative, more electable candidate.** This means that while Trump is polling around the 40% mark, his true base of support is likely around 25% in these early states. And the 25% level is likely high because:

- Some respondents don't want to look indecisive during an interview and are reluctant to say they are open to voting for someone other than the person they just expressed support for.
- **67% of Trump supporters acknowledge he has electability issues in the general election.**
- When Trump supporters are asked if they would support him running as a third party (if he were to lose the GOP primary), only 14% of likely GOP primary/caucus voters say they would. This likely represents his true floor of support among GOP primary voters.

These numbers not only demonstrate the potential of other candidates to take vote-share from President Trump in the early states, but also represents an opportunity for Americans for Prosperity Action to remind voters about the electability issues among these “soft Trump” voters — a robust effort that is currently underway.

**2. General election electability matters.**

As demonstrated by the data pertaining to electability, a candidate’s ability to win in the general election does factor into primary voters’ minds. This is particularly true in the early primary states (IA, NH, SC) where for decades, candidates have spent a significant amount of time in these states and the voters have come to expect it. Voters in these states take their job as “presidential taste testers” seriously and are very passionate about the role their state plays not just in nominating someone, but nominating someone who can win the general election.

Because of this, general election matchups are an important data point for voters to consider. Many public surveys put out by news organizations that show former President Trump beating President Biden are flawed. We also looked at how Trump compares to President Biden and his next closest contender, which at this moment is Gov. DeSantis, and found similar flaws. These surveys are mainly of all adults in the U.S., which is an inaccurate pool of people to survey, as just over half of U.S. adults actually vote in presidential-year elections. If you look at the current general election matchup among ONLY registered voters that are likely to vote, the data tells a different story.

Biden	47%	Biden	45%
Trump	45%	DeSantis	47%

The above example uses Gov. DeSantis, but other well-known current and potential GOP contenders also beat Biden. Additionally, general elections for president aren’t held at the national level. The current electoral college system makes a handful of “swing” states the real deciders. When looking at the likely general election voters in these states, the disadvantage President Trump has against President Biden in a potential rematch becomes even more apparent.

Arizona		Wisconsin	
Trump / Biden	Tied	Trump / Biden	-2
DeSantis / Biden	+5	DeSantis / Biden	+2
Nevada		Pennsylvania	
Trump / Biden	-7	Trump / Biden	-1
DeSantis / Biden	Tied	DeSantis / Biden	+4

It should also be noted that the four swing states above also have competitive U.S. Senate and House races in 2024, so a weak candidate at the top of the ticket can greatly impact those down-ticket races in a negative way.

### **3. Seven months until the first vote.**

As noted previously, the 2023-24 Republican presidential candidate nominating process will be different in a number of ways from what took place in 2016. President Trump is not an outsider without a policy record anymore. His lines of attack on his opponents are no longer novel, and unlike 2015 where candidates didn't start going after Trump until late in the primary, the current announced and prospective field is more than willing to draw a contrast now.

With a dozen or so candidates announcing or considering running, the opportunity for them to contrast President Trump in the next seven months is immense. Through earned media, town halls, advertisements, and debates, there will be ample opportunities for candidates to outline and implement a more electable path. There will also be a platform for them to further convince the "soft Trump" voters and others as to the potential of their candidacy. All efforts that should continue to lower the base of support for the former president and move vote-share to the other candidates.

### **4. Polls now often don't reflect election results.**

At this point in 2007, Rudy Giuliani was leading the national and early state polls among GOP primary voters. In 2015, Jeb Bush led the pack, but in the summer months Scott Walker broke through as the front-running candidate. In 2012, Mitt Romney was considered to be "next in line" and so led in most of the polls; but even in summer 2011, several polls had Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry beating Romney.

It should also be noted that the winner of the first-in-the nation vote, the Iowa caucus, did not go on to be the GOP nominee in 2008, 2012, or 2016. As always, each election has its own unique dynamics. But if history is any gauge, things will look different in seven months when the first votes are cast.