

Despite convention attacks on Biden, the election is still a referendum on Donald Trump

This week the Republican Party held its national convention to nominate Donald Trump as the party's presidential candidate. In this Q&A, LSE US Centre Director [Professor Peter Trubowitz](#) comments that the Republicans' attacks on the Democrats as being soft on law and order issues at their convention is part of their attempt to win back white suburban voters. To see whether these attacks have found their mark, we should keep a close eye on Democratic presidential candidate, former Vice President, Joe Biden's favorability ratings in the coming days.

What has Republican National Convention so far told us about Trump's election strategy?

That Trump is running behind, and that he knows it. For me the single biggest takeaway from the non-stop bashing of the Democratic ticket for being soft on "law and order" is that Team Trump is desperately concerned about losing [suburban white voters](#), especially, white college-educated female voters. Trump has reason to worry. Recent polls show between [57 and 61 percent](#) of college-educated white voters support Biden. The big message of the Democrat's victory in the 2018 midterms is that Trump's agenda — dismantling Obamacare; separating immigrant children from their parents at the border — was not popular in the suburbs. He needs a way to woo those voters back, and a big part of Trump's strategy at the Republican convention has been to try to scare those voters back into the arms of the party.

Were there any big surprises at the Republican convention?

What surprised me the most is that Republicans didn't even think it was worth trying to convince voters that they weren't completely subservient to Trump. Most of the rest of the convention was predictable: the over reliance on family members for speeches testifying to Trump's "love of country," "empathy for people," and "honesty"; and the unwillingness to acknowledge let alone offer a plan to deal with the pandemic (save First Lady Melania Trump's speech); and the dark, angry, brooding tone of the whole affair. As the [LA Times](#) aptly put it after Day 1 of the convention, Trump's Republican Party is living in a "parallel universe." The question is whether the remaining undecided voters (about [10 percent](#) of prospective voters) prefer to live in that world for the next four years or the one Democrats described last week at their convention.

What should we be keeping an eye on in the coming days?

I will be looking to see what impact, if any, the Republican convention had on Biden's poll numbers and especially, his favorability rating. Currently Biden's favorability is running at [45 percent](#), a five percent pickup since the Democratic convention. By contrast, Trump's favorability stands at 32 percent. Trump needs to drive voters' favorable-to-unfavorable view of Biden down and much of the past four days was devoted to that task. Will it succeed? It is a difficult sell because the very political traits that make progressive Democrats uncomfortable about Biden (e.g. "too middle of the road;" "too willing to work with Republicans") are attributes that make him appealing to those white suburban voters (see above) who have misgivings about Mr. Trump. If Biden's favorables don't drop after four days of non-stop Biden bashing at the Republican convention, Trump is going to have to find another way to make this a choice between Biden and himself. Otherwise this will remain where it is today: a referendum on his presidency.

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