

Subject: Frail and vulnerable

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Hi Robert,

Once young and vibrant, American democracy now looks as frail and vulnerable as the 81-year-old man who struggled to defend it at last week's US presidential debate.

I was in Atlanta for the duel where Joe Biden's stumbling, raspy-voiced performance allowed his rival, convicted criminal Donald Trump, to spew a torrent of lies on national television almost unchallenged. The former president sought to shift blame for the deadly January 6 2021 insurrection and hedged on whether he would accept the election result in November.

When the torment was over, Republicans flooded the post-debate spin zone. Glowing and gleeful, Trump's potential vice-presidential picks strained to outdo each other with ever more grandiloquent claims of victory. Democrats took longer to emerge, had less to say and are now in a paralyzing panic.

The timing could not have been worse at a moment when democracy is under attack from all sides. Last week the rightwing supreme court [narrowed the scope of federal bribery law](#), made it [harder to charge US Capitol riot defendants](#) with obstruction and [curbed the regulatory power of the government](#) on the environment and other issues.

Then, on Monday, the court ruled that [presidents have immunity from prosecution](#) for “official acts”, making it virtually certain that Trump’s January 6 case will not go to trial before the election. [In her dissent](#), Justice Sonia Sotomayor warned: “The relationship between the president and the people he serves has shifted irrevocably. In every use of official power, the president is now a king above the law.”

With public trust in the court at an all-time low, and with the White House and Congress at stake in November, watched closely by Russia’s Vladimir Putin and other autocrats around the world, this is a break-the-glass moment for American democracy.

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Thank you.

Yours,
David

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