

Gaming The 2024 Campaign



by Victor Davis Hanson

We have seen enough of the Biden-Trump race so far to predict what lies ahead over the next seven months of the campaign. Currently, the polls are about dead even. Trump, however, for now enjoys small leads in the majority of the fickle swing/purple states that will likely decide the election.

So here is what we should expect:

Biden

Biden has three major vulnerabilities and three major assets. His fate will depend on how these criteria play out.

First, on the negative side of the ledger, Biden suffers continual mental and physical decline, which is accelerating exponentially. His work week is now more off than on. Aides pray that he can get through a teleprompter without complete incoherence. His speech is so slurred, his syntax so bizarre that he seems to speak a language that is mostly indecipherable.

They rightly fear that any young attractive woman or even preteen might earn a trademark Biden weird call-out, a hair-or accustomed ear-blow, or even an attempted presidential too-long hug or neck nibble.

Steps pose an existential threat, given that the president is one trip away from oblivion. Biden is not even the diminished Biden of 2020, when, in his basement, he at least manipulated the COVID-19 lockdown to mask his infirmities and abbreviated schedules.

The odds are 50/50 whether Biden will even make it over the

next five months to the August Democratic Convention. And, assuming that he does, can he rein in efforts to push him off the ticket?

Second, the Biden family is corrupt. Hunter still faces spring- and summer-long felony exposure in connection with his Biden-family brand of tax cheating. Joe knows that his own documents, first-hand witnesses, bank statements, Hunter's emails, and testimonies from Hunter's associates reveal that the otherwise talentless but high-living Biden extended family was surviving only by the sale of Senator, Vice President, and future President Joe Biden's name—and his known willingness to pay fast and loose with legal and ethical constraints.

There is still some chance that, in the current impeachment investigations and trial, more incriminating evidence will emerge or turned witnesses will offer proof of Biden's criminality. For now, Biden's lawbreaking is completely dismissed by Attorney General Merrick Garland and by special counsel Robert Hur's satirical-comedy-worthy argument that even overwhelming evidence pointing to Joe Biden's criminal behavior cannot be prosecuted because of the president's dementia.

Third, the hard-left Biden agenda is completely underwater. Not a single Biden administration issue or policy—the border, crime, inflation, energy, foreign policy, race relations, education—polls even 50 percent. Worse, Biden never addresses the inflation created by his massive spending program, the lawlessness in our streets since 2021, the spiking cost of gasoline, or the humiliation abroad, from Kabul to Kyiv to the Chinese balloon. His idea of how to combat inflation is akin to combating obesity by gaining 100 pounds, losing two, and—presto—announcing that obesity was abated.

He spiked racial polarization, proved indifferent to an epidemic of anti-Semitism, and fueled the national debt (an additional \$1 trillion every 100 days).

Now Biden is warring on the Supreme Court—a dangerous precedent given that an assassin has already shown up at Justice Kavanaugh’s home, given that mobs have massed at various justices’ residences with impunity, given Sen. Schumer’s prior personal threats at the very doors of the court to Justices Kavanaugh and Gorsuch, and given left-wing rhetoric about packing the court.

All candidate Biden can do is either deny an open border, inflation, crime, racial tensions, and the Kabul humiliation—or claim that the successful policies of Trump, out of power for nearly four years, were responsible for all that crashed on Biden’s watch.

Biden, however, enjoys some natural advantages, most notably incumbency.

(Note that this was not much of an advantage to Trump himself in 2020, given the wild cards of the COVID-19 pandemic, the disastrous nationwide lockdown, and the mysterious workings of the Trump-hating administrative state. We remember the 11th-hour Pfizer declaration that there would be no pre-election announcement, as planned, of the success of Trump’s Operation Warp Speed vaccination initiative. Then, there was indeed an announcement—immediately *after* the election. And then there was the mysterious CIA/FBI arming of the Biden campaign, on the eve of the last debate and just days before Election Day, with the fake anti-Trump rebuttal of “Russian laptop disinformation.”)

Biden will pull every lever of incumbency, working the office of the presidency in the most Machiavellian and cynical of ways:

a) hoping to lower gas prices by not filling up the strategic petroleum reserve, jawboning illiberal and “pariah” oil producers to pump what he claims he hates, ordering Ukraine not to hit Russian refineries, and appeasing enemies like Iran

to keep its oil flowing,

b) unconstitutionally sidestepping rulings of the Supreme Court to ensure more pre-election illegal student-loan-cancellation giveaways,

c) prodding the supposedly independent Federal Reserve to lower interest rates before November,

d) pressuring Mexico to tamp down illegal entries for a few months to serve their shared interests in defeating Trump.

A second asset is his army of satellites.

These include left-wing justices, weaponized federal, state, and local prosecutors, and Trump-biased jury pools. The left expects these to do what the effort to remove Trump's name from the ballot did not: destroy the Republican candidate, financially and health-wise, and bind him with the Lilliputian ropes of Fani Willis, Letitia James, Alvin Bragg, and Jack Smith, who are eager to convict him through weaponized judges, juries, and a venomous media. They also include compromised election officials in urban counties in key swing states.

Biden cannot win unless 70-80 percent of voters in the key swing states do *not* vote on Election Day. Instead, their ballots must be mailed in, harvested, and curated without accustomed audit and without verification of whether voters are registered US citizens or have voted only once and done so legally.

And—his third major asset—Biden will also have billions of dollars more than Trump to pound home these themes in endless ads, social media shenanigans, and news censorship and blackouts.

Biden feels that he nevertheless must make the election hinge on destroying a monstrous, demonic, and hideous Donald Trump through any means necessary. Biden's is not a positive

campaign but will be waged by despising Donald Trump and all who support him. Expect more of those “semi-fascists”/ “ultra-MAGA” Phantom-of-the-Opera Biden hate speeches.

In the next seven months, the Biden effort will play out with three narratives: Trump is a January 6th insurrectionist and dictator and will “destroy democracy,” though apparently without weaponizing the FBI or removing his opponents’ names from ballots or siccing right-wing prosecutors on his enemies.

Trump purportedly will kill women by banning all abortions while relegating non-whites to the pre-civil-rights era—despite leaving abortion up to the states, and likely gaining more Latino and Black voters than any prior Republican presidential candidate. Then we will hear that Trump is a felon who belongs in jail.

All this is the message of the Biden campaign, period.

Trump

Trump likewise has both assets and liabilities. His vulnerabilities are mirror images of Biden’s advantages: he lacks incumbency and the powers that come with it; he does not have an army of officials on his side; and he will have a financial disadvantage.

We have no idea how many gag orders remain. How many late-summer days will Trump spend stuck in court? How many hundreds of millions of his dollars will be expropriated by out-of-control anti-Trump left-wing judges? Can Trump—or any candidate—successfully run with a \$1 billion overhead in legal fees and fines and with critical days on the campaign trail diverted to left-wing, media-frenzied, blue-city courtrooms?

In addition, Trump is sometimes his own worst enemy. Trump, one could say, is running mostly against Trump. He knows that if he sticks solely to the agenda, contrasting Biden’s failures with his own past stellar record and future contract

with America, he can win. He realizes that he must take the high road and talk idealistically rather than going low and getting angry.

But who could be expected to do so after being the victim of two unfair impeachments, left-wing lies like Russian collusion and disinformation, efforts to railroad him into prison with outrageously politicized legal vendettas, and attempts to remove his name from the ballot?

Trump's advantages are clear. First, his record: on foreign policy, inflation, and the economy. But most important for the election is his ability to connect with people. So far, the split-screen differences between candidate Trump and President Biden have proved overwhelmingly to Trump's advantage: Biden in New York schmoozing at a black-tie night with celebrities and ex-presidents to haul in \$26 million in campaign cash from the hyper-rich, while Trump is with middle-class NYPD rank-and-file at a rainy wake for a murdered cop—killed by a repeat felon released without bail.

Or Trump buying fast food and milkshakes amid a mostly black Atlanta Chick-fil-A crowd, while Biden dines with the venomous Robert De Niro and the zillionaire Jeff Bezos at a White House dinner, with the celebrities' trophy girls vying to get the most stares at their multi-thousand-dollar designer clothes—as if they were on the red carpet at the Oscars rather than in the people's house.

What can Trump do to make the best use of all this? He must magnanimously reach out to former rivals such as Haley, even as she continues to demonize him, and to DeSantis as well. He must unite the House Republicans to keep their razor-thin majority at all costs. He must campaign nonstop among poor whites, blacks, and Latinos, appealing to shared class concerns rather than the racial obsessions and psychodramas of the bicoastal elite.

He should skip the ad hominem invective, forget the past rivalries with his primary opponents, and assume a corrupt media does not deserve a minute of his time. If he does this, he can win.

But if he climbs down into the mud with his leftist opponents, trades insults, wrestles with his opponents, and obsesses about fake news and the crooked media, he will likely lose.

Aside from Trump's temperament, we must always remember that the answers to two other fundamental questions will determine the outcome of the election:

Can the Republicans monitor the balloting and return it to the environment of 2016 rather than 2020?

Can Trump convince millions of minorities, independents, and former Biden voters that there are plenty of reasons to vote for someone they may not like—including the very future of the United States as a free republic as envisioned by the Founders, rather than an increasingly weak, anemic, cranky socialist has-been?

Finally, we must also remember that, ultimately, the outcome of the election could be determined by unpredictable events. What happens if the Gaza War expands to Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, as Israel is attacked from all directions? Or the military of the United States is attacked in the Middle East, as in the past?

What will be the status of Ukraine by November—static, safer, or absorbed by Russia—and who will be praised or blamed for what ensues?

Will China risk attacking or blockading Taiwan on the theory that it will never be gifted a more ossified president than Biden?

Will the left unleash another late-season October surprise

like the 2016 Access Hollywood tape or the 2020 “Russian disinformation” laptop farce? And will these desperate gambits resonate or boomerang?

And, lastly, will the candidates in October and November resemble the candidates of today? These are the two oldest candidates ever to run for president. Will Trump still be vibrant at 78? Will Biden still be upright at 81?

Will Biden’s feebleness still earn him sympathy, or at least respectful silence? Or will it devolve to the point that the public, worn out by his lapses, concludes that Joe Biden would not be able to keep any job in America—except the Presidency of the United States?

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