

Joe Biden is no longer mentally well enough to be president

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The spectacle of [Joe Biden](#)'s psychological and cognitive decline is both sad and deeply alarming. At a press conference in Hanoi on Sunday, [the 80-year-old US president was cut off mid-flow by his aides](#) after yet another rambling and often incomprehensible performance in which he described [climate change](#) deniers, bafflingly, as “lying, dog-faced pony soldiers” and appeared to confuse the movie *Good Morning, Vietnam* with a song.

Since 1973, American psychiatrists have observed the so-called “Goldwater Rule” that clinicians do not offer public opinions on, or diagnose those whom they have not personally evaluated; this followed an ugly controversy in the 1964 presidential [election](#) in which more than 1,000 of them had declared Barry Goldwater, the Republican nominee, unfit for office. And — more generally — this has discouraged journalists and other observers from commenting recklessly upon the psychological state of politicians.

In Biden's case, however, the evidence is simply undeniable. In March, on the day of the [Nashville school shooting](#), he said: “I came down because I heard there was chocolate chip ice cream.”



President Joe Biden falls on stage during the 2023 United States Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony at Falcon Stadium, United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs
AP

In June, the [president](#) ended a speech in Connecticut with the words “God save the Queen, man”. In the same month, he declared that [Vladimir Putin “is clearly losing the war in Iraq”](#) and announced “plans to build a railroad from the Pacific all the way across the Indian Ocean”.

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In his new book, *The Last Politician: Inside Joe Biden's White House and The Struggle for America's Future*, Franklin Foer writes that, by the end of 2022, "his advanced years were a hindrance, depriving him of the energy to cast a robust public presence or the ability to easily conjure a name ... His public persona reflected physical decline and time's dulling of mental faculties that no pill or exercise regimen can resist. In private, he would occasionally admit to friends that he felt tired".

Biden's psychological condition cannot be sealed off as a private matter. As the most powerful figure in the free world and leader of the mightiest nation on Earth, he bears almost unimaginable responsibilities. His mental impairment is a matter of geo-political consequence, as well as personal poignancy.



President-elect Joe Biden leans toward the cheering crowd, past the edge of protective glass on stage, in Wilmington, Delaware
AP

For his fellow [Democrats](#), this presents a hideous dilemma. As the 2024 presidential election draws closer, it is being asked with increasing urgency whether he can, or should face the rigours of another lengthy campaign and a likely rematch with [Donald Trump](#).

It is absolutely true that the Republican ex-president, who is 77, also talks nonsense in his public appearances. But he does so with vigour and energy. Opinion polls suggest that voters are less concerned by Trump's age than they are by Biden's.

Assuming that the president does not change his mind about a second term, the options available to Democrats are bleak. Under the 25th amendment of the [US](#) constitution, vice-president [Kamala Harris](#) and a majority of the cabinet could relieve Biden of command for being "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office". In recent interviews, Harris has pointedly said that she "may have to take over" and is ready to do so.

But Biden's forcible removal would be another constitutional precedent for a nation still coming to terms with the 91 criminal charges laid against Trump. It is a conceivable outcome — but only just.

More to the point: the field of alternative candidates is not strong. Harris herself, Gavin Newsom (the governor of California), Gretchen Whitmer (his Michigan counterpart) and the maverick anti-vaxxer Robert F Kennedy Jr would all present less of a challenge to Trump than Biden, who did, after all, beat him in 2020.

The Democrats are also haunted by the memory of 1968, when Lyndon Johnson declared that he would not stand in a second presidential election, and (after the assassination of Robert F Kennedy), the eventual candidate, Hubert Humphrey, was defeated by [Richard Nixon](#).

Instead, Biden's strategists are betting on two risky assumptions: first, that the president's deterioration will not accelerate and that he will be able to handle — just about — the impending campaign; and second, that the polls which show Biden and Trump neck and neck conceal the supposed probability that independents and ethnic minority voters will, on the day, rally round the Democratic flag.

As things stand, Americans will have a choice between a candidate facing serious jail time and an incumbent who can barely speak sense; between deranged criminality and advancing senility. The republic is in grave peril.

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