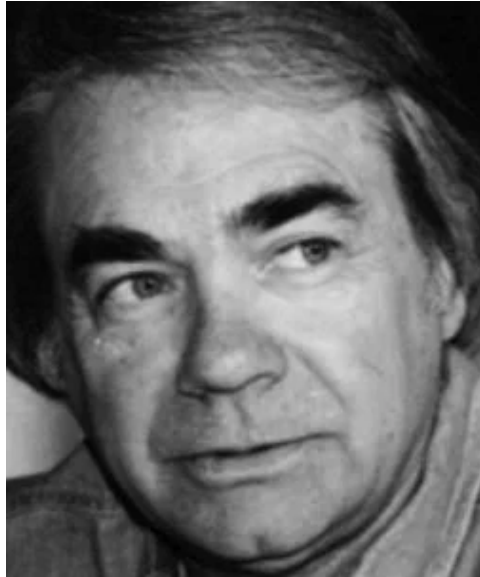


## Golden: Biden's growing challenges

By Carl Golden

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Stung by a succession of high profile polls showing President Joe Biden trailing former president Donald Trump among crucial swing state voters, the White House and its allies in Congress have scrambled to calm jittery nerves and reassure donors and establishment leaders all is well and under control.

Many aren't buying it.

There have been demands the campaign change its strategy, direction and messaging. Others have mused aloud what many of their colleagues voiced privately — perhaps it's time for the president to reconsider his decision to seek a second term.

The official reaction from the campaign team and the White House has produced more skepticism than satisfaction and won't be heeded, despite repeated warning signs the American people hold the president responsible for the ills afflicting them and seems incapable of overcoming them.

Bluntly put, “Bidenomics” — the president’s blueprint for economic growth — has been a flop, largely because it is a futile attempt to convince the American people to ignore their real life experiences of rising costs of living, punishing interest rates and the general unaffordability of everything from housing to automobiles to groceries.

The president’s overall approval rating is lodged at 40 percent, and an astonishing 70 percent believe the country is moving in the wrong direction.

His disapproval is above 60 percent on inflation, the economy, foreign policy, crime and immigration.

In hypothetical matchups against Trump, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, the president trails by between 1 and 4 percent. His support among normally reliable voting blocs of young persons and minorities has eroded alarmingly.

Democrats are divided — often bitterly so — over the administration’s posture in the war between Israel and Hamas. Questions and concerns over his age, physical stamina and cognitive skills are stubbornly persistent, and a majority of self-identified Democrats believe he is too old to serve a second term and would prefer another candidate.

In light of what appears to many to be the ingredients for a landslide loss, the “keep calm and carry on” reaction from the White House and campaign team seems jarringly out of touch with the national mood.

The president’s defenders point out the election is a year off — a time span in which the political dynamic can change dramatically — and that polling this far out from actual voting is not indicative of the ultimate result.

Moreover, they argue, it is Trump himself who voters will find so dangerous and extreme they will turn away from him no matter their misgivings about the president and his record.

The American people may be discontent with Biden, but they live in fear of Trump. Or so goes the theory.

The ex-president’s legal entanglements and the jeopardy posed by guilty verdicts will drag on through the primary election process and could impact voters’ decisions.

Trump's increasingly strident attacks on his opponents, his incendiary rhetoric, and threats to retaliate against and prosecute his critics if he returns to the presidency have provided ample fodder for the Biden campaign to emphasize the existential peril of placing him and his extreme MAGA band of followers at the head of government.

The strategy is an effort — similar to his victory of 2020 — to turn the election into a referendum on Trump rather than on the Biden record.

Despite the misgivings over gloomy polling data, Biden has given no indication he's considering a change of heart.

The larger establishment remains supportive. Biden faces no significant primary opposition and will accept his re-nomination at next summer's convention.

The polling may continue to paint a bleak picture in the coming months, producing more agita for the party establishment.

They'll just have to get used to it. \_\_\_\_\_

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