

How good are Biden's political skills?

It is difficult to determine Joe Biden's level of political skill, and the contradictory evidence does not help. Based on Biden's campaigns' performances during

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his 1988 and 2008 presidential runs, he does not look formidable. For instance, in 1988, he gave a speech that had already been given by an English politician, and in 2008, he did so poorly early in the campaign, during the Iowa caucus, that he dropped out. Eventually, as you know, he won in 2020 and is President.

But, his recent success could be due to his association with President Barack Obama. After serving as Obama's vice president, voters linked Biden with the popular former president.

Had Biden not served with Obama, Biden may not have been as successful in the 2020 election. It is also unclear whether Biden's defeat of Trump is an impressive victory. Some people view Trump as a media savvy political innovator, while others view him as a clown who cannot string together coherent sentences. I remain unde-

cided and think these evaluations will be best performed by historians after some time has passed.

Given that Biden's past does adequately predict how he will handle future political challenges, we must watch as he deals with them during his presidency. Not long ago, he likely made a mistake by threatening to veto a bipartisan infrastructure bill if it did not arrive on his desk along with a huge spending bill, backed by progressive democrats. Biden's veto threat was a mistake because it was not credible. In strategic games, like the one between Biden and the republicans, one's opponent only believes threats when the person making the threats has an incentive to follow through on them; and, here, Biden had no incentive to follow through. If the infrastructure bill was delivered to his desk but the progressive spending bill was defeated in the Senate, Biden would still sign the infrastructure bill. Biden and moderate democrats would pay a political price if Biden blocked a popular bipartisan initiative like the infrastructure bill, so Biden would sign the bipartisan bill.

Notice that the previous paragraph indicated that Biden may have made a mistake. He quickly changed his mind on his veto threat, so no harm was really done.

Why did Biden change his mind? Most likely, it was because he got some good advice from a capable advisor. This sequence of events is encouraging. I think most people can agree that Biden does not excite the base like Trump does or have the political entrepreneurial skills Trump has (such as the ability to effectively use Twitter), but Biden is showing himself to have something that may prove even more valuable than Trump's political assets. Namely, Biden is willing to listen to advisors and he appears to be able to get good people to work for him.

Biden's strengths were Trump's greatest weaknesses. Trump was abusive, so many very talented people refused to work for him. Also, Trump thought he knew more than his advisors, so he often did not listen to them. It will be interesting to see how Biden's presidency plays out. Will his willingness to take advice and to surround himself with good people serve him better than Trump's skills served the former President? Biden may appear favorable in this comparison because the Presidency is such a big job that one person can't do it well without a lot of good help. Biden's ability remains a mystery, and we need even more time to pass before the mystery is resolved.