

= Joe Biden =

Joseph Robinette " Joe " Biden Jr . ( / ʒəˈdʒoʊˌbaɪdən / ; born November 20 , 1942 ) is the 47th and current Vice President of the United States , having been jointly elected twice with President Barack Obama . A member of the Democratic Party , Biden represented Delaware as a United States Senator from 1973 until becoming Vice President in 2009 .

Biden was born in Scranton , Pennsylvania , in 1942 , and lived there for ten years before moving to Delaware . He became an attorney in 1969 , and was elected to the New Castle County council in 1970 . Biden was first elected to the Senate in 1972 , and became the sixth @-@ youngest senator in U.S. history . He was re @-@ elected to the Senate six times , and was the fourth most senior senator at the time of his resignation to assume the Vice Presidency in 2009 . Biden was a long @-@ time member and former chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee . He opposed the Gulf War in 1991 , but advocated U.S. and NATO intervention in the Bosnian War in 1994 and 1995 . Biden voted in favor of the resolution authorizing the Iraq War in 2002 , but opposed the surge of U.S. troops in 2007 . He has also served as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee , dealing with issues related to drug policy , crime prevention , and civil liberties , and led the legislative efforts for creation of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act , and the Violence Against Women Act . He chaired the Judiciary Committee during the contentious U.S. Supreme Court nominations of Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas .

Biden unsuccessfully sought the Democratic presidential nomination in 1988 and in 2008 , both times dropping out early in the race . In the 2008 U.S. presidential election , Barack Obama chose Biden to be his running mate in the race , which they won . Biden became the first Roman Catholic , and the first Delawarean , to be Vice President of the United States .

As Vice President in the Obama administration , Biden oversaw the infrastructure spending aimed at counteracting the Great Recession , and U.S. policy toward Iraq up until the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011 . His ability to negotiate with congressional Republicans helped bring about legislation such as the Tax Relief , Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization , and Job Creation Act of 2010 that resolved a taxation deadlock , the Budget Control Act of 2011 that resolved that year 's debt ceiling crisis , and the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 that addressed the impending " fiscal cliff " . In 2011 , Biden opposed going ahead with the military mission that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden . Obama and Biden were re @-@ elected in 2012 . In October 2015 , after months of speculation , Biden chose not to run for President of the United States in 2016 .

= = Early life = =

Biden was born on November 20 , 1942 , at St. Mary 's Hospital in Scranton , Pennsylvania , to Catherine Eugenia " Jean " Biden ( née Finnegan ; 1917 ? 2010 ) and Joseph Robinette " Joe " Biden Sr. ( 1915 ? 2002 ) . He was the first of four siblings in a Catholic family , with a sister , Valerie , and two brothers , James and Frank , following . His mother was of either Irish or Northern Irish descent , with roots variously attributed to County Louth or County Londonderry . His paternal grandparents , Mary Elizabeth ( Robinette ) and Joseph H. Biden , an oil businessman from Baltimore , Maryland , were of English , French , and Irish ancestry . His paternal great @-@ great @-@ great grandfather , William Biden , was born in Sussex , England , and immigrated to the United States . His maternal great @-@ grandfather , Edward Francis Blewitt , was a member of the Pennsylvania State Senate .

Biden 's father had been very well @-@ off earlier in his life , but suffered several business reversals by the time Biden was born . For several years , the family had to live with Biden 's maternal grandparents , the Finnegans . When the Scranton area went into economic decline during the 1950s , Biden 's father could not find enough work . In 1953 , the Biden family moved to an apartment in Claymont , Delaware , where they lived for a few years before moving to a house in Wilmington , Delaware . Joe Biden Sr. then did better as a used car salesman , and the family 's circumstances were middle class .

Biden attended the Archmere Academy in Claymont , Delaware , where he was a standout halfback

/ wide receiver on the high school football team ; he helped lead a perennially losing team to an undefeated season in his senior year . He played on the baseball team as well . During these years , he participated in an anti @-@ segregation sit @-@ in at a Wilmington theatre . Academically , Biden was an above @-@ average student , was considered a natural leader among the students , and was elected class president during his junior and senior years . He graduated in 1961 .

Biden earned his BA in 1965 from the University of Delaware , with a double major in history and political science , graduating with a class rank of 506 out of 688 . His classmates were impressed by his cramming abilities , and he played halfback with the Blue Hens freshman football team . In 1964 , while on spring break in the Bahamas , he met and began dating Neilia Hunter , who was from an affluent background in Skaneateles , New York and attended Syracuse University . He told her that he aimed to become a Senator by the age of 30 and then President . He dropped a junior year plan to play for the varsity football team as a defensive back , enabling him to spend more time visiting out of state with her .

He then entered Syracuse University College of Law , receiving a half scholarship based on financial need with some additional assistance based on academics . By his own description , he found law school to be " the biggest bore in the world " and pulled many all @-@ nighters to get by . During his first year there , he was accused of having plagiarized 5 of 15 pages of a law review article . Biden said it was inadvertent due to his not knowing the proper rules of citation , and he was permitted to retake the course after receiving an " F " grade , which was subsequently dropped from his record ( this incident would later attract attention when further plagiarism accusations emerged in 1987 ) . He received his Juris Doctor in 1968 , graduating 76th of 85 in his class . Biden was admitted to the Delaware bar in 1969 .

Biden received student draft deferments during this period , at the peak of the Vietnam War , and in 1968 , he was reclassified by the Selective Service System as not available for service due to having had asthma as a teenager . He never took part in anti @-@ war demonstrations , later saying that at the time he was preoccupied with marriage and law school , and " wore sports coats ... not tie @-@ dyed " .

Negative impressions of drinking alcohol in the Biden and Finnegan families and in the neighborhood led to Joe Biden becoming a teetotaler . Biden suffered from stuttering through much of his childhood and into his twenties , and overcame it by spending many hours reciting poetry in front of a mirror .

= = Early political career and family life = =

On August 27 , 1966 , Biden , while still a law student , married Neilia Hunter . They overcame her parents ' initial reluctance for her to wed a Roman Catholic , and the ceremony was held in a Catholic church in Skaneateles . They had three children , Joseph R. " Beau " Biden III ( 1969 ? 2015 ) , Robert Hunter ( born 1970 ) , and Naomi Christina ( 1971 ? 1972 ) .

During 1968 , Biden clerked for six months at a Wilmington law firm headed by prominent local Republican William Prickett and , as he later said , " thought of myself as a Republican " . He disliked the conservative racial politics of incumbent Democratic Governor of Delaware Charles L. Terry and supported a more liberal Republican , Russell W. Peterson , who defeated Terry in 1968 . The local Republicans tried to recruit Biden , but he resisted due to his distaste for Republican presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon , and registered as an Independent instead .

In 1969 , Biden resumed practicing law in Wilmington , first as a public defender and then at a firm headed by Sid Balick , a locally active Democrat . Balick named Biden to the Democratic Forum , a group trying to reform and revitalize the state party , and Biden switched his registration to Democratic . Biden also started his own firm , Biden and Walsh . Corporate law , however , did not appeal to him and criminal law did not pay well . He supplemented his income by managing properties .

Later in 1969 , Biden ran as a Democrat for the New Castle County Council on a liberal platform that included support for public housing in the suburban area . He won by a solid , two @-@ thousand vote margin in the usually Republican district and in a bad year for Democrats in the state

. Even before taking his seat , he was already talking about running for the U.S. Senate in a couple of years . Biden served on the County Council from 1970 to 1972 while continuing his private law practice . Among issues he addressed on the council was his opposition to large highway projects that might disrupt Wilmington neighborhoods , including those related to Interstate 95 .

= = United States Senator = =

= = Election and tragedy ; recovery and new family = = =

Biden 's entry into the 1972 U.S. Senate election in Delaware presented a unique circumstance . Longtime Delaware political figure and Republican incumbent Senator J. Caleb Boggs was considering retirement , which would likely have left U.S. Representative Pete du Pont and Wilmington Mayor Harry G. Haskell Jr. in a divisive primary fight . To avoid that , U.S. President Richard M. Nixon helped convince Boggs to run again with full party support . No other Democrat wanted to run against Boggs . Biden 's campaign had virtually no money and was given no chance of winning . It was managed by his sister Valerie Biden Owens ( who would go on to manage his future campaigns as well ) and staffed by other members of his family , and relied upon handed @-@ out newsprint position papers and meeting voters face @-@ to @-@ face ; the small size of the state and lack of a major media market made the approach feasible . Biden did receive some assistance from the AFL @-@ CIO and Democratic pollster Patrick Caddell . Biden 's campaign issues focused on withdrawal from Vietnam , the environment , civil rights , mass transit , more equitable taxation , health care , the public 's dissatisfaction with politics @-@ as @-@ usual , and " change " . During the summer , Biden trailed by almost 30 percentage points , but his energy level , his attractive young family , and his ability to connect with voters ' emotions gave the surging Biden an advantage over the ready @-@ to @-@ retire Boggs . Biden won the November 7 , 1972 , election in an upset by a margin of 3 @,@ 162 votes .

On December 18 , 1972 , a few weeks after the election , Biden 's wife and one @-@ year @-@ old daughter Naomi were killed in an automobile accident while Christmas shopping in Hockessin , Delaware . Neilia Biden 's station wagon was hit by a tractor @-@ trailer as she pulled out from an intersection ; the truck driver was cleared of any wrongdoing . Biden 's sons Beau and Hunter survived the accident and were taken to the hospital in fair condition , Beau with a broken leg and other wounds , and Hunter with a minor skull fracture and other head injuries . Doctors soon said both would make full recoveries . Biden considered resigning to care for them , but was persuaded not to by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield .

Biden was sworn into office on January 5 , 1973 , by Francis R. Valeo , the Secretary of the Senate in a small chapel at the Delaware Division of the Wilmington Medical Center . Beau was wheeled in with his leg still in traction ; Hunter , who had already been released , was also there , as were other members of the extended family . Witnesses and television cameras were also present and the event received national attention .

At age 30 ( the minimum age required to hold the office ) , Biden became the sixth @-@ youngest senator in U.S. history , and one of only 18 senators who took office before reaching the age of 31 . But the accident left him filled with both anger and religious doubt : " I liked to [ walk around seedy neighborhoods ] at night when I thought there was a better chance of finding a fight ... I had not known I was capable of such rage ... I felt God had played a horrible trick on me . " To be at home every day for his young sons , Biden began the practice of commuting every day by Amtrak train for 1 ½ hours each way from his home in the Wilmington suburbs to Washington , D.C. , which he continued to do throughout his Senate career . In the aftermath of the accident , he had trouble focusing on work , and appeared to just go through the motions of being a senator . In his memoirs , Biden notes that staffers were taking bets on how long he would last . A single father for five years , Biden left standing orders that he be interrupted in the Senate at any time if his sons called . In remembrance of his wife and daughter , Biden does not work on December 18 , the anniversary of the accident .

Biden 's elder son , Beau , became Delaware Attorney General and an Army Judge Advocate who served in Iraq ; his younger son , Hunter , became a Washington attorney and lobbyist . On May 30 , 2015 , Beau died at the age of 46 after a two @-@ year battle with brain cancer . At the time of his death , Beau had been widely seen as the frontrunner to be the Democratic nominee for Governor of Delaware in 2016 .

In 1975 , Biden met Jill Tracy Jacobs , who grew up in Willow Grove , Pennsylvania , and would become a teacher in Delaware . They had met on a blind date arranged by Biden 's brother , although it turned out that Biden had already noticed a photograph of her earlier in an advertisement for a local park in Wilmington , Delaware . Biden would credit her with renewing his interest in both politics and life . On June 17 , 1977 , Biden and Jacobs were married by a Catholic priest at the Chapel at the United Nations in New York . Jill Biden has a bachelor 's degree from the University of Delaware ; two master 's degrees , one from West Chester University , and one Villanova University ; and a doctorate in education from the University of Delaware . They have one daughter together , Ashley Blazer ( born 1981 ) , who became a social worker and staffer at the Delaware Department of Services for Children , Youth , and Their Families . Biden and his wife are Roman Catholics and regularly attend Mass at St. Joseph 's on the Brandywine in Greenville , Delaware .

= = = Early Senate activities = = =

During his first years in the Senate , Biden focused on legislation regarding consumer @-@ protection and environmental issues and called for greater accountability on the part of government . In mid @-@ 1974 , freshman Senator Biden was named one of the 200 Faces for the Future by Time magazine , in a profile that mentioned what had happened to his family and characterized Biden as " self @-@ confident " and " compulsively ambitious " .

Biden became ranking minority member of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary in 1981 . In 1984 , he was Democratic floor manager for the successful passage of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act ; civil libertarians praised him for modifying some of the Act 's provisions , and it was his most important legislative accomplishment at that point in time . Biden first considered running for president in that year , after he gained notice for giving speeches to party audiences that simultaneously scolded and encouraged Democrats .

Regarding foreign policy , during his first decade in the Senate , Biden focused on arms control issues . In response to the refusal of the U.S. Congress to ratify the SALT II Treaty signed in 1979 by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and President Jimmy Carter , Biden took the initiative to meet the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko , educated him about American concerns and interests , and secured several changes to address objections of the Foreign Relations Committee . When the Reagan administration wanted to interpret the 1972 SALT I Treaty loosely in order to allow the Strategic Defense Initiative to proceed , Biden argued for strict adherence to the treaty 's terms . Biden clashed again with the Reagan administration in 1986 over economic sanctions against South Africa ; he received considerable attention when he excoriated Secretary of State George P. Shultz at a Senate hearing because of the administration 's support of that country , which continued to practice the apartheid system .

= = = 1988 presidential campaign = = =

Biden ran for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination , formally declaring his candidacy at the Wilmington train station on June 9 , 1987 . He was attempting to become the youngest president since John F. Kennedy . When the campaign began , Biden was considered a potentially strong candidate because of his moderate image , his speaking ability on the stump , his appeal to Baby Boomers , his high profile position as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee at the upcoming Robert Bork Supreme Court nomination hearings , and his fundraising appeal . He raised \$ 1 @. 7 million in the first quarter of 1987 , more than any other candidate .

By August 1987 , Biden 's campaign , whose messaging was confused due to staff rivalries , had begun to lag behind those of Michael Dukakis and Dick Gephardt , although he had still raised more

funds than all candidates but Dukakis , and was seeing an upturn in Iowa polls . In September 1987 , the campaign ran into trouble when he was accused of plagiarizing a speech that had been made earlier that year by Neil Kinnock , leader of the British Labour Party . Kinnock 's speech included the lines :

" Why am I the first Kinnock in a thousand generations to be able to get to university ? [ Then pointing to his wife in the audience ] Why is Glenys the first woman in her family in a thousand generations to be able to get to university ? Was it because all our predecessors were thick ? "

While Biden 's speech included the lines :

" I started thinking as I was coming over here , why is it that Joe Biden is the first in his family ever to go to a university ? [ Then pointing to his wife in the audience ] Why is it that my wife who is sitting out there in the audience is the first in her family to ever go to college ? Is it because our fathers and mothers were not bright ? Is it because I 'm the first Biden in a thousand generations to get a college and a graduate degree that I was smarter than the rest ? "

Biden had in fact cited Kinnock as the source for the formulation on previous occasions . But he made no reference to the original source at the August 23 Democratic debate at the Iowa State Fair being reported on , nor in an August 26 interview for the National Education Association . Moreover , while political speeches often appropriate ideas and language from each other , Biden 's use came under more scrutiny because he fabricated aspects of his own family 's background in order to match Kinnock 's . Biden was soon found to have earlier that year lifted passages from a 1967 speech by Robert F. Kennedy ( for which Biden aides took the blame ) and a short phrase from the 1961 inaugural address of John F. Kennedy , and in two prior years to have done the same with a 1976 passage from Hubert H. Humphrey .

A few days later , Biden 's plagiarism incident in law school came to public light . Video was also released showing that when earlier questioned by a New Hampshire resident about his grades in law school , Biden had stated that he had graduated in the " top half " of his class , that he had attended law school on a full scholarship , and that he had received three degrees in college , each of which was untrue or exaggerations of his actual record .

The Kinnock and school revelations were magnified by the limited amount of other news about the nomination race at the time , when most of the public were not yet paying attention to any of the campaigns ; Biden thus fell into what The Washington Post writer Paul Taylor described as that year 's trend , a " trial by media ordeal " . Biden lacked a strong demographic or political group of support to help him survive the crisis . He withdrew from the nomination race on September 23 , 1987 , saying his candidacy had been overrun by " the exaggerated shadow " of his past mistakes .

After Biden withdrew from the race , it was revealed that the Dukakis campaign had secretly made a video highlighting the Biden ? Kinnock comparison and distributed it to news outlets . Later in 1987 , the Delaware Supreme Court 's Board of Professional Responsibility cleared Biden of the law school plagiarism charges regarding his standing as a lawyer , saying Biden had " not violated any rules " .

In February 1988 , after suffering from several episodes of increasingly severe neck pain , Biden was taken by long @-@ distance ambulance to Walter Reed Army Medical Center and given lifesaving surgery to correct an intracranial berry aneurysm that had begun leaking ; the situation was serious enough that a priest had administered last rites at the hospital . While recuperating , he suffered a pulmonary embolism , which represented a major complication . Another operation to repair a second aneurysm , which had caused no symptoms but was also at risk from bursting , was performed in May 1988 . The hospitalization and recovery kept Biden from his duties in the U.S. Senate for seven months . Biden has had no recurrences or effects from the aneurysms since then . In retrospect , Biden 's family came to believe that the early end to his presidential campaign had been a blessing in disguise , for had he still been campaigning in the midst of the primaries in early 1988 , he might well have not have stopped to seek medical attention and the condition might have become unsurvivable .

= = = Judiciary Committee = = =

Biden was a long @-@ time member of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary . He chaired it from 1987 until 1995 and he served as ranking minority member on it from 1981 until 1987 and again from 1995 until 1997 .

While chairman , Biden presided over the two most contentious U.S. Supreme Court confirmation hearings in history , those for Robert Bork in 1987 and Clarence Thomas in 1991 . In the Bork hearings , Biden stated his opposition to Bork soon after the nomination , reversing an approval in an interview of a hypothetical Bork nomination he had made the previous year and angering conservatives who thought he could not conduct the hearings dispassionately . At the close , Biden won praise for conducting the proceedings fairly and with good humor and courage , as his 1988 presidential campaign collapsed in the middle of the hearings . Rejecting some of the less intellectually honest arguments that other Bork opponents were making , Biden framed his discussion around the belief that the U.S. Constitution provides rights to liberty and privacy that extend beyond those explicitly enumerated in the text , and that Bork 's strong originalism was ideologically incompatible with that view . Bork 's nomination was rejected in the committee by a 9 ? 5 vote , and then rejected in the full Senate by a 58 ? 42 margin .

In the Thomas hearings , Biden 's questions on constitutional issues were often long and convoluted , sometimes such that Thomas forgot the question being asked . Viewers of the high @-@ profile hearings were often annoyed by Biden 's style . Thomas later wrote that despite earlier private assurances from the senator , Biden 's questions had been akin to a beanball . The nomination came out of the committee without a recommendation , with Biden opposed . In part due to his own bad experiences in 1987 with his presidential campaign , Biden was reluctant to let personal matters enter into the hearings . Biden initially shared with committee , but not the public , Anita Hill 's sexual harassment charges , on the grounds she was not yet willing to testify . After she did , Biden did not permit other witnesses to testify further on her behalf , such as Angela Wright ( who made a similar charge ) and experts on harassment . Biden said he was striving to preserve Thomas 's right to privacy and the decency of the hearings . The nomination was approved by a 52 ? 48 vote in the full Senate , with Biden again opposed . During and afterwards , Biden was strongly criticized by liberal legal groups and women 's groups for having mishandled the hearings and having not done enough to support Hill . Biden subsequently sought out women to serve on the Judiciary Committee and emphasized women 's issues in the committee 's legislative agenda .

Biden was involved in crafting many federal crime laws . He spearheaded the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 , also known as the Biden Crime Law , which included the Federal Assault Weapons Ban , which expired in 2004 after its ten @-@ year sunset period and was not renewed . It also included the landmark Violence Against Women Act ( VAWA ) , which contains a broad array of measures to combat domestic violence . In 2000 , the Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Morrison* that the section of VAWA allowing a federal civil remedy for victims of gender @-@ motivated violence exceeded Congress 's authority and therefore was unconstitutional . Congress reauthorized VAWA in 2000 and 2005 . Biden has said , " I consider the Violence Against Women Act the single most significant legislation that I 've crafted during my 35 @-@ year tenure in the Senate . " In 2004 and 2005 , Biden enlisted major American technology companies in diagnosing the problems of the Austin , Texas @-@ based National Domestic Violence Hotline , and to donate equipment and expertise to it in a successful effort to improve its services .

Biden was critical of the actions of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr during the 1990s Whitewater controversy and Lewinsky scandal investigations , and said " it 's going to be a cold day in hell " before another Independent Counsel is granted the same powers . Biden voted to acquit on both charges during the impeachment of President Clinton .

As chairman of the International Narcotics Control Caucus , Biden wrote the laws that created the U.S. " Drug Czar " , who oversees and coordinates national drug control policy . In April 2003 , he introduced the controversial Reducing Americans ' Vulnerability to Ecstasy Act , also known as the RAVE Act . He continued to work to stop the spread of " date rape drugs " such as flunitrazepam , and drugs such as Ecstasy and Ketamine . In 2004 , he worked to pass a bill outlawing steroids like androstenedione , the drug used by many baseball players .

Biden 's " Kids 2000 " legislation established a public / private partnership to provide computer

centers , teachers , Internet access , and technical training to young people , particularly to low @-@ income and at @-@ risk youth .

= = = Foreign Relations Committee = = =

Biden was also a long @-@ time member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations . In 1997 , he became the ranking minority member and chaired the committee in January 2001 and from June 2001 through 2003 . When Democrats re @-@ took control of the Senate following the 2006 elections , Biden again assumed the top spot on the committee in 2007 . Biden was generally a liberal internationalist in foreign policy . He collaborated effectively with important Republican Senate figures such as Richard Lugar and Jesse Helms and sometimes went against elements of his own party . Biden was also co @-@ chair of the NATO Observer Group in the Senate . A partial list covering this time showed Biden meeting with some 150 leaders from nearly 60 countries and international organizations . Biden held frequent hearings as chair of the committee , as well as holding many subcommittee hearings during the three times he chaired the Subcommittee on European Affairs .

Biden became interested in the Yugoslav Wars after hearing about Serbian abuses during the Croatian War of Independence in 1991 . Once the Bosnian War broke out , Biden was among the first to call for the " lift and strike " policy of lifting the arms embargo , training Bosnian Muslims and supporting them with NATO air strikes , and investigating war crimes . Both the George H. W. Bush administration and Clinton administration were reluctant to implement the policy , fearing Balkan entanglement . In April 1993 , Biden spent a week in the Balkans and held a tense three @-@ hour meeting with Serbian leader Slobodan Milo?evi? . Biden related that he told Milo?evi? , " I think you 're a damn war criminal and you should be tried as one . " Biden wrote an amendment in 1992 to compel the Bush administration to arm the Bosnians , but deferred in 1994 to a somewhat softer stance preferred by the Clinton administration , before signing on the following year to a stronger measure sponsored by Bob Dole and Joe Lieberman . The engagement led to a successful NATO peacekeeping effort . Biden has called his role in affecting Balkans policy in the mid @-@ 1990s his " proudest moment in public life " that related to foreign policy . In 1999 , during the Kosovo War , Biden supported the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia and Montenegro , and co @-@ sponsored with his friend John McCain the McCain @-@ Biden Kosovo Resolution , which called on President Clinton to use all necessary force , including ground troops , to confront Milosevic over Serbian actions in Kosovo . In 1998 , Congressional Quarterly named Biden one of " Twelve Who Made a Difference " for playing a lead role in several foreign policy matters , including NATO enlargement and the successful passage of bills to streamline foreign affairs agencies and punish religious persecution overseas .

Biden had voted against authorization for the Gulf War in 1991 , siding with 45 of the 55 Democratic senators ; he said the U.S. was bearing almost all the burden in the anti @-@ Iraq coalition . Biden was a strong supporter of the 2001 war in Afghanistan , saying " Whatever it takes , we should do it . " Regarding Iraq , Biden stated in 2002 that Saddam Hussein was a threat to national security , and that there was no option but to eliminate that threat . In October 2002 , Biden voted in favor of the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq , justifying the Iraq War . While he soon became a critic of the war and viewed his vote as a " mistake " , he did not push to require a U.S. withdrawal . He supported the appropriations to pay for the occupation , but argued repeatedly that the war should be internationalized , that more soldiers were needed , and that the Bush administration should " level with the American people " about the cost and length of the conflict .

By late 2006 , Biden 's stance had shifted , and he opposed the troop surge of 2007 , saying General David Petraeus was " dead , flat wrong " in believing the surge could work . Biden was instead a leading advocate for dividing Iraq into a loose federation of three ethnic states . In November 2006 , Biden and Leslie H. Gelb , President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations , released a comprehensive strategy to end sectarian violence in Iraq . Rather than continuing the present approach or withdrawing , the plan called for " a third way " : federalizing Iraq and giving Kurds , Shiites , and Sunnis " breathing room " in their own regions . In September 2007 , a non

@-@ binding resolution passed the Senate endorsing such a scheme . However , the idea was unfamiliar , had no political constituency , and failed to gain traction . Iraq 's political leadership united in denouncing the resolution as a de facto partitioning of the country , and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad issued a statement distancing itself .

In March 2004 , Biden secured the brief release of Libyan democracy activist and political prisoner Fathi Eljahmi , after meeting with leader Muammar Gaddafi in Tripoli . In May 2008 , Biden sharply criticized President George W. Bush for his speech to Israel 's Knesset in which he suggested that some Democrats were acting in the same way some Western leaders did when they appeased Hitler in the runup to World War II . Biden stated : " This is bullshit . This is malarkey . This is outrageous . Outrageous for the president of the United States to go to a foreign country , sit in the Knesset ... and make this kind of ridiculous statement . " Biden later apologized for using the expletive . Biden further stated , " Since when does this administration think that if you sit down , you have to eliminate the word ' no ' from your vocabulary ? "

= = = Delaware matters = = =

Biden was a familiar figure to his Delaware constituency , by virtue of his daily train commuting from there , and generally sought to attend to state needs . Biden was a strong supporter of increased Amtrak funding and rail security ; he hosted barbecues and an annual Christmas dinner for the Amtrak crews , and they would sometimes hold the last train of the night a few minutes so he could catch it . He earned the nickname " Amtrak Joe " as a result ( and in 2011 , Amtrak 's Wilmington Station was named the Joseph R. Biden Jr . Railroad Station , in honor of the over 7 @,@ 000 trips he made from there ) . He was an advocate for Delaware military installations , including Dover Air Force Base and New Castle Air National Guard Base .

In 1975 , Biden broke from liberal orthodoxy when he took legislative action to limit desegregation busing . In doing so , he said busing was a " bankrupt idea [ that violated ] the cardinal rule of common sense , " and that his opposition would make it easier for other liberals to follow suit . Three years later , Wilmington 's federally mandated cross @-@ district busing plan generated much turmoil , and in trying to legislate a compromise solution , Biden found himself alienating both black and white voters for a while .

Beginning in 1991 , Biden served as an adjunct professor at the Widener University School of Law , Delaware 's only law school , teaching a seminar on constitutional law . The seminar was one of Widener 's most popular , often with a waiting list for enrollment . Biden typically co @-@ taught the course with another professor , taking on at least half the course minutes and sometimes flying back from overseas to make one of the classes .

Biden was a sponsor of bankruptcy legislation during the 2000s , which was sought by MBNA , one of Delaware 's largest companies , and other credit card issuers . Biden allowed an amendment to the bill to increase the homestead exemption for homeowners declaring bankruptcy and fought for an amendment to forbid anti @-@ abortion felons from using bankruptcy to discharge fines ; the overall bill was vetoed by Bill Clinton in 2000 but then finally passed as the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act in 2005 , with Biden supporting it . The downstate Sussex County region is the nation 's top chicken @-@ producing area , and Biden held up trade agreements with Russia when that country stopped importing U.S. chickens .

In 2007 , Biden requested and gained \$ 67 million worth of projects for his constituents through congressional earmarks .

Biden sits on the board of advisors of the Close Up Foundation , which brings high school students to Washington for interaction with legislators on Capitol Hill .

= = = Characteristics as senator = = =

Following his initial election in 1972 , Biden was re @-@ elected to six additional terms , in the elections of 1978 , 1984 , 1990 , 1996 , 2002 , and 2008 , usually getting about 60 percent of the vote . He did not face strong opposition ; Pete du Pont , then governor , chose not to run against him



in 1984 . Biden spent 28 years as a junior senator due to the two @-@ year seniority of his Republican colleague William V. Roth Jr . After Roth was defeated for re @-@ election by Tom Carper in 2000 , Biden became Delaware 's senior senator . He then became the longest @-@ serving senator in Delaware history . In May 1999 , Biden set the mark for youngest senator to cast 10 @,@ 000 votes .

With a net worth between \$ 59 @,@ 000 and \$ 366 @,@ 000 , and almost no outside income or investment income , Biden was consistently ranked as one of the least wealthy members of the Senate . Biden stated that he was listed as the second poorest member in Congress , a distinction that he was not proud of , but attributed to being elected early in his career . Biden realized early in his senatorial career how vulnerable poorer public officials are to offers of financial contributions in exchange for policy support , and he pushed campaign finance reform measures during his first term .

During his years as a senator , Biden amassed a reputation for loquaciousness , with his questions and remarks during Senate hearings being especially known for being long @-@ winded . He has been a strong speaker and debater and a frequent and effective guest on the Sunday morning talk shows . In public appearances , he is known to deviate from prepared remarks at will . According to political analyst Mark Halperin , he has shown " a persistent tendency to say silly , offensive , and off @-@ putting things " ; The New York Times writes that Biden 's " weak filters make him capable of blurting out pretty much anything " . Nor is Biden known for modesty ; journalist James Traub has written that " Biden 's vanity and his regard for his own gifts seem considerable even by the rarefied standards of the U.S. Senate . "

Political writer Howard Fineman has said that , " Biden is not an academic , he 's not a theoretical thinker , he 's a great street pol . He comes from a long line of working people in Scranton ? auto salesmen , car dealers , people who know how to make a sale . He has that great Irish gift . " Political columnist David S. Broder has viewed Biden as having grown since he came to Washington and since his failed 1988 presidential bid : " He responds to real people ? that 's been consistent throughout . And his ability to understand himself and deal with other politicians has gotten much much better . " Traub concludes that " Biden is the kind of fundamentally happy person who can be as generous toward others as he is to himself . "

= = 2008 presidential election = =

Biden ran for the Democratic nomination for president in 2008 , and on the national ticket as eventual nominee Barack Obama 's running @-@ mate .

= = Biden presidential campaign = = =

Biden had thought about running for president again ever since his failed 1988 bid .

Biden declared his candidacy for president on January 31 , 2007 , after having discussed running for months prior , and first made a formal announcement to Tim Russert on Meet the Press on January 7 , stating he would " be the best Biden I can be . " In January 2006 , Delaware newspaper columnist Harry F. Thelma wrote that Biden " occupies the sensible center of the Democratic Party . " Thelma concludes that this is the position Biden desires , and that in a campaign " he plans to stress the dangers to the security of the average American , not just from the terrorist threat , but from the lack of health assistance , crime , and energy dependence on unstable parts of the world . "

During his campaign , Biden focused on the war in Iraq and his support for the implementation of the Biden @-@ Gelb plan to achieve political success . He touted his record in the Senate as the head of major congressional committees and his experience on foreign policy . Despite speculation to the contrary , Biden rejected the notion of accepting the position of Secretary of State , focusing only on the presidency . At a 2007 campaign event , Biden said , " I know a lot of my opponents out there say I 'd be a great Secretary of State . Seriously , every one of them . Do you watch any of the debates ? ' Joe 's right , Joe 's right , Joe 's right . ' " Other candidates ' comments that " Joe is right

" in the Democratic debates were converted into a Biden campaign theme and ad . In mid @-@ 2007 , Biden stressed his foreign policy expertise compared to Obama 's , saying of the latter , " I think he can be ready , but right now I don 't believe he is . The presidency is not something that lends itself to on @-@ the @-@ job training . " Biden also said that Obama was copying some of his foreign policy ideas . Biden was noted for his one @-@ liners on the campaign trail , saying of Republican then @-@ frontrunner Rudy Giuliani at the debate on October 30 , 2007 , in Philadelphia , " There 's only three things he mentions in a sentence : a noun , and a verb and 9 / 11 . " Overall , Biden 's debate performances were an effective mixture of humor and sharp and surprisingly disciplined comments .

Biden made remarks during the campaign that attracted controversy . On the day of his January 2007 announcement , he spoke of fellow Democratic candidate and Senator Barack Obama : " I mean , you got the first mainstream African @-@ American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice @-@ looking guy , I mean , that 's a storybook , man . " This comment undermined his campaign as soon as it began and significantly damaged his fund @-@ raising capabilities ; it later took second place on Time magazine 's list of Top 10 Campaign Gaffes for 2007 . Biden had earlier been criticized in July 2006 for a remark he made about his support among Indian Americans : " I 've had a great relationship . In Delaware , the largest growth in population is Indian @-@ Americans moving from India . You cannot go to a 7 @-@ Eleven or a Dunkin ' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent . I 'm not joking . " Biden later said the remark was not intended to be derogatory .

Overall , Biden had difficulty raising funds , struggled to draw people to his rallies , and failed to gain traction against the high @-@ profile candidacies of Obama and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton ; he never rose above single digits in the national polls of the Democratic candidates . In the initial contest on January 3 , 2008 , Biden placed fifth in the Iowa caucuses , garnering slightly less than one percent of the state delegates . Biden withdrew from the race that evening , saying " There is nothing sad about tonight .... I feel no regret . "

Despite the lack of success , Biden 's stature in the political world rose as the result of his campaign . In particular , it changed the relationship between Biden and Obama . Although the two had served together on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee , they had not been close , with Biden having resented Obama 's quick rise to political stardom , and Obama having viewed Biden as garrulous and patronizing . Now , having gotten to know each other during 2007 , Obama appreciated Biden 's campaigning style and appeal to working class voters , and Biden was convinced that Obama was " the real deal " .

= = = Democratic nominee for vice president = = =

Since shortly following Biden 's withdrawal from the presidential race , Obama had been privately telling Biden that he was interested in finding an important place for him in a possible Obama administration . Biden declined Obama 's first request to vet him for the vice presidential slot , fearing the vice presidency would represent a loss in status and voice from his Senate position , but subsequently changed his mind . In a June 22 , 2008 , interview on NBC 's Meet the Press , Biden confirmed that , although he was not actively seeking a spot on the ticket , he would accept the vice presidential nomination if offered . In early August , Obama and Biden met in secret to discuss a possible vice @-@ presidential relationship , and the two hit it off well personally . On August 22 , 2008 , Barack Obama announced that Biden would be his running mate . The New York Times reported that the strategy behind the choice reflected a desire to fill out the ticket with someone who has foreign policy and national security experience ? and not to help the ticket win a swing state or to emphasize Obama 's " change " message . Other observers pointed out Biden 's appeal to middle class and blue @-@ collar voters , as well as his willingness to aggressively challenge Republican nominee John McCain in a way that Obama seemed uncomfortable doing at times . In accepting Obama 's offer , Biden ruled out to him the possibility of running for president again in 2016 ( although comments by Biden in subsequent years seemed to back off that stance , with Biden not wanting to diminish his political power by appearing uninterested in advancement ) . Biden was officially nominated for vice president on August 27 by voice vote at the 2008 Democratic National

Convention in Denver , Colorado .

After his selection as a vice presidential candidate , Biden was criticized by his own Roman Catholic Diocese of Wilmington Bishop Michael Saltarelli over his stance on abortion , which goes against the church 's pro @-@ life beliefs and teachings . The diocese confirmed that even if elected vice president , Biden would not be allowed to speak at Catholic schools . Biden was soon barred from receiving Holy Communion by the bishop of his original hometown of Scranton , Pennsylvania , because of his support for abortion rights ; however , Biden did continue to receive Communion at his local Delaware parish . Scranton became a flash point in the competition for swing state Catholic voters between the Democratic campaign and liberal Catholic groups , who stressed that other social issues should be considered as much or more than abortion , and many bishops and conservative Catholics , who maintained abortion was paramount . Biden said he believed that life began at conception but that he would not impose his personal religious views on others . Bishop Saltarelli had previously stated regarding stances similar to Biden 's : " No one today would accept this statement from any public servant : ' I am personally opposed to human slavery and racism but will not impose my personal conviction in the legislative arena . ' Likewise , none of us should accept this statement from any public servant : ' I am personally opposed to abortion but will not impose my personal conviction in the legislative arena . ' "

Biden 's vice presidential campaigning gained little media visibility , as far greater press attention was focused on the Republican running mate , Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin . During one week in September 2008 , for instance , the Pew Research Center 's Project for Excellence in Journalism found that Biden was only included in five percent of the news coverage of the race , far less than for the other three candidates on the tickets . Biden nevertheless focused on campaigning in economically challenged areas of swing states and trying to win over blue @-@ collar Democrats , especially those who had supported Hillary Rodham Clinton . Biden attacked McCain heavily , despite a long @-@ standing personal friendship ; he would say , " That guy I used to know , he 's gone . It literally saddens me . " As the financial crisis of 2007 ? 2010 reached a peak with the liquidity crisis of September 2008 and the proposed bailout of United States financial system became a major factor in the campaign , Biden voted in favor of the \$ 700 billion Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 , which passed the Senate 74 ? 25 .

On October 2 , 2008 , Biden participated in the campaign 's one vice presidential debate with Palin . Post @-@ debate polls found that while Palin exceeded many voters ' expectations , Biden had won the debate overall . On October 5 , Biden suspended campaign events for a few days after the death of his mother @-@ in @-@ law . During the final days of the campaign , Biden focused on less @-@ populated , older , less well @-@ off areas of battleground states , especially in Florida , Ohio , and Pennsylvania , where polling indicated he was popular and where Obama had not campaigned or performed well in the Democratic primaries . He also campaigned in some normally Republican states , as well as in areas with large Catholic populations .

Under instructions from the Obama campaign , Biden kept his speeches succinct and tried to avoid off @-@ hand remarks , such as one about Obama being tested by a foreign power soon after taking office , which had attracted negative attention . Privately , Obama was frustrated by Biden 's remarks , saying " How many times is Biden gonna say something stupid ? " Obama campaign staffers referred to Biden blunders as " Joe bombs " and kept Biden uninformed about strategy discussions , which in turn irked Biden . Relations between the two campaigns became strained for a month , until Biden apologized on a call to Obama and the two built a stronger partnership . Publicly , Obama strategist David Axelrod said that any unexpected comments had been outweighed by Biden 's high popularity ratings . Nationally , Biden had a 60 percent favorability rating in a Pew Research Center poll , compared to Palin 's 44 percent .

On November 4 , 2008 , Obama was elected President and Biden Vice President of the United States . The Obama @-@ Biden ticket won 365 Electoral College votes to McCain @-@ Palin 's 173 , and had a 53 ? 46 percent edge in the nationwide popular vote .

Biden had continued to run for his Senate seat as well as for Vice President , as permitted by Delaware law . On November 4 , Biden was also re @-@ elected as senator , defeating Republican Christine O 'Donnell . Having won both races , Biden made a point of holding off his resignation from

the Senate so that he could be sworn in for his seventh term on January 6 , 2009 . He became the youngest senator ever to start a seventh full term , and said , " In all my life , the greatest honor bestowed upon me has been serving the people of Delaware as their United States senator . " Biden cast his last Senate vote on January 15 , supporting the release of the second \$ 350 billion for the Troubled Asset Relief Program . Biden resigned from the Senate later that day ; in emotional farewell remarks on the Senate floor , where he had spent most of his adult life , Biden said , " Every good thing I have seen happen here , every bold step taken in the 36 @-@ plus years I have been here , came not from the application of pressure by interest groups , but through the maturation of personal relationships . "

= = Vice Presidency = =

= = = Post @-@ election transition and first term = = =

As the presidential transition of Barack Obama began , Biden said he was in daily meetings with Obama and that McCain was still his friend . The U.S. Secret Service codename given to Biden is " Celtic " , referencing his Irish roots .

Biden chose veteran Democratic lawyer and aide Ron Klain to be his chief of staff , and Time Washington bureau chief Jay Carney to be his director of communications . Biden intended to eliminate some of the explicit roles assumed by the vice presidency of his predecessor , Dick Cheney , who had established himself as an autonomous power center . Otherwise , Biden said he would not model his vice presidency on any of the ones before him , but instead would seek to provide advice and counsel on every critical decision Obama would make . Biden said he had been closely involved in all the cabinet appointments that were made during the transition . Biden was also named to head the new White House Task Force on Working Families , an initiative aimed at improving the economic well being of the middle class . As his last act as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee , Biden went on a trip to Iraq , Afghanistan and Pakistan during the second week of January 2009 , meeting with the leadership of those countries .

Biden became the 47th Vice President of the United States on January 20 , 2009 , when he was inaugurated alongside President Barack Obama . Biden is the first United States Vice President from Delaware and the first Roman Catholic to attain that office . Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens administered the oath of office to Biden .

In the early months of the Obama administration , Biden assumed the role of an important behind @-@ the @-@ scenes counselor . One role was to adjudicate disputes between Obama 's " team of rivals " . The president compared Biden 's efforts to a basketball player " who does a bunch of things that don 't show up in the stat sheet . " Biden played a key role in gaining Senate support for several major pieces of Obama legislation , and was a main factor in convincing Senator Arlen Specter to switch from the Republican to the Democratic party . Biden lost an internal debate to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton regarding his opposition to sending 21 @,@ 000 new troops to the war in Afghanistan . His skeptical voice was still considered valuable within the administration , however , and later in 2009 Biden 's views achieved more prominence within the White House as Obama reconsidered his Afghanistan strategy .

Biden made visits to Iraq about once every two months , including trips to Baghdad in August and September 2009 to listen to Prime Minister Nouri al @-@ Maliki and reiterate U.S. stances on Iraq 's future ; by this time he had become the administration 's point man in delivering messages to Iraqi leadership about expected progress in the country . More generally , overseeing Iraq policy became Biden 's responsibility , when the president said in 2009 : " Joe , you do Iraq " . Biden said Iraq " could be one of the great achievements of this administration . " Biden 's January 2010 visit to Iraq in the midst of turmoil over banned candidates from the upcoming Iraqi parliamentary election resulted in 59 of the several hundred candidates being reinstated by the Iraqi government two days later . By 2012 , Biden had made eight trips there , but his oversight of U.S. policy in Iraq receded with the exit in 2011 of U.S. troops .

Biden was also in charge of the oversight role for infrastructure spending from the Obama stimulus package intended to help counteract the ongoing recession , and stressed that only worthy projects should get funding . He talked with hundreds of governors , mayors , and other local officials in this role . During this period , Biden was satisfied that no major instances of waste or corruption had occurred , and when he completed that role in February 2011 , he said that the number of fraud incidents with stimulus monies had been less than one percent .

It took some time for the cautious Obama and the blunt , rambling Biden to work out ways of dealing with each other . In late April 2009 , Biden 's off @-@ message response to a question during the beginning of the swine flu outbreak , that he would advise family members against travelling on airplanes or subways , led to a swift retraction from the White House . The remark revived Biden 's reputation for gaffes , and led to a spate of late @-@ night television jokes themed on him being a loose @-@ talking buffoon . In the face of persistently rising unemployment through July 2009 , Biden acknowledged that the administration had " misread how bad the economy was " but maintained confidence that the stimulus package would create many more jobs once the pace of expenditures picked up . The same month , Secretary of State Clinton quickly disavowed Biden 's remarks disparaging Russia as a power , but despite any missteps , Biden still retained Obama 's confidence and was increasingly influential within the administration . On March 23 , 2010 , a microphone picked up Biden telling the president that his signing of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was " a big fucking deal " during live national news telecasts . White House press secretary Robert Gibbs replied via Twitter " And yes Mr. Vice President , you 're right ... " Senior Obama advisor Valerie Jarrett said that Biden 's loose talk " [ is ] part of what makes the vice president so endearing ... We wouldn 't change him one bit . " Former Senate colleague Lindsey Graham said , " If there were no gaffes , there 'd be no Joe . He 's someone you can 't help but like . " Biden gained a long @-@ running alter ego persona , " The President of Vice " , on the satirical news site The Onion , which parodied his job title . Despite their different personalities , Obama and Biden formed a friendship , partly based around Obama 's daughter Sasha and Biden 's granddaughter Maisy , who attended Sidwell Friends School together .

Biden 's most important role within the administration has been to question assumptions , playing a contrarian role . Obama said that , " The best thing about Joe is that when we get everybody together , he really forces people to think and defend their positions , to look at things from every angle , and that is very valuable for me . " Another senior Obama advisor said Biden " is always prepared to be the skunk at the family picnic to make sure we are as intellectually honest as possible . " On June 11 , 2010 , Biden represented the United States at the opening ceremony of the World Cup , attended the England v. U.S. game which was tied 1 ? 1 , and visited Egypt , Kenya , and South Africa . Throughout , Joe and Jill Biden maintained a relaxed atmosphere at their official residence in Washington , often entertaining some of their grandchildren , and regularly returned to their home in Delaware .

Biden campaigned heavily for Democrats in the 2010 midterm elections , maintaining an attitude of optimism in the face of general predictions of large @-@ scale losses for the party . Following large @-@ scale Republican gains in the elections and the departure of White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel , Biden 's past relationships with Republicans in Congress became more important . He led the successful administration effort to gain Senate approval for the New START treaty . In December 2010 , Biden 's advocacy within the White House for a middle ground , followed by his direct negotiations with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell , were instrumental in producing the administration 's compromise tax package that revolved around a temporary extension of the Bush tax cuts . Biden then took the lead in trying to sell the agreement to a reluctant Democratic caucus in Congress , which was passed as the Tax Relief , Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization , and Job Creation Act of 2010 .

In March 2011 , Obama detailed Biden to lead negotiations between both houses of Congress and the White House in resolving federal spending levels for the rest of the year and avoid a government shutdown . By May 2011 , a " Biden panel " with six congressional members was trying to reach a bipartisan deal on raising the U.S. debt ceiling as part of an overall deficit reduction plan . The U.S. debt ceiling crisis developed over the next couple of months , but it was again Biden 's relationship

with McConnell that proved to be a key factor in breaking a deadlock and finally bringing about a bipartisan deal to resolve it , in the form of the Budget Control Act of 2011 , signed on August 2 , 2011 , the same day that an unprecedented U.S. default had loomed . Biden had spent the most time bargaining with Congress on the debt question of anyone in the administration , and one Republican staffer said , " Biden 's the only guy with real negotiating authority , and [ McConnell ] knows that his word is good . He was a key to the deal . "

= = = 2012 re @-@ election campaign = = =

In October 2010 , Biden stated that Obama had asked him to remain as his running mate for the 2012 presidential election . With Obama 's popularity on the decline , however , in late 2011 White House Chief of Staff William M. Daley conducted some secret polling and focus group research into the idea of Secretary of State Clinton replacing Biden on the ticket . The notion was dropped when the results showed no appreciable improvement for Obama , and White House officials later said that Obama had never entertained the idea .

Biden 's May 2012 statement that he was " absolutely comfortable " with same @-@ sex marriage gained considerable public attention in comparison to President Obama 's position , which had been described as " evolving " . Biden made his statement without administration consent , and Obama and his aides were quite irked , since Obama had planned to shift position several months later , in the build @-@ up to the party convention , and since Biden had previously counseled the president to avoid the issue lest key Catholic voters be offended . Gay rights advocates seized upon the Biden stance , and within days , Obama announced that he too supported same @-@ sex marriage , an action in part forced by Biden 's unexpected remarks . Biden apologized to Obama in private for having spoken out , while Obama acknowledged publicly it had been done from the heart . The incident showed that Biden still struggled at times with message discipline ; as Time wrote , " everyone knows [ that ] Biden 's greatest strength is also his greatest weakness . " Relations were also strained between the campaigns when Biden appeared to use his to bolster fundraising contacts for a possible run on his own in the 2016 presidential election , and the vice president ended up being excluded from Obama campaign strategy meetings .

The Obama campaign nevertheless still valued Biden as a retail @-@ level politician who could connect with disaffected , blue collar workers and rural residents , and he had a heavy schedule of appearances in swing states as the Obama re @-@ election campaign began in earnest in spring 2012 . An August 2012 remark before a mixed @-@ race audience that proposed Republican relaxation of Wall Street regulations would " put y 'all back in chains " led to a similar analysis of Biden 's face @-@ to @-@ face campaigning abilities versus tendency to go off track . The Los Angeles Times wrote , " Most candidates give the same stump speech over and over , putting reporters if not the audience to sleep . But during any Biden speech , there might be a dozen moments to make press handlers cringe , and prompt reporters to turn to each other with amusement and confusion . " Time magazine wrote that Biden often goes too far and that " Along with the familiar Washington mix of neediness and overconfidence , Biden 's brain is wired for more than the usual amount of goofiness . "

Biden was officially nominated for a second term as vice president on September 6 by voice vote at the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte , North Carolina . He faced his Republican counterpart , Representative Paul Ryan , in the lone 2012 vice presidential debate on October 11 in Danville , Kentucky . There he made a feisty , emotional defense of the Obama administration 's record and energetically attacked the Republican ticket , in an effort to regain campaign momentum lost by Obama 's unfocused debate performance against Republican nominee Mitt Romney the week before .

On November 6 , 2012 , the president and vice president were elected to second terms . The Obama @-@ Biden ticket won 332 Electoral College votes to Romney @-@ Ryan 's 206 and had a 51 ? 47 percent edge in the nationwide popular vote .

= = = Post @-@ election and second term = = =

In December 2012 , Biden was named by Obama to head the Gun Violence Task Force , created to address the causes of gun violence in the United States in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting . Later that month , during the final days before the country fell off the " fiscal cliff " , Biden 's relationship with McConnell once more proved important as the two negotiated a deal that led to the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 being passed at the start of 2013 . It made permanent much of the Bush tax cuts but raised rates on upper income levels .

Biden was inaugurated to a second term in the early morning of January 20 , 2013 , at a small ceremony in his official residence with Justice Sonia Sotomayor presiding ( a public ceremony took place on January 21 ) . He continued to be in the forefront as , in the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting , the Obama administration put forth executive orders and proposed legislation towards new gun control measures ( the legislation failed to pass ) .

During the discussions that led to the October 2013 passage of the Continuing Appropriations Act , 2014 , which resolved the U.S. federal government shutdown of 2013 and the U.S. debt @-@ ceiling crisis of 2013 , Biden played little role . This was due to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and other Democratic leaders cutting the vice president out of any direct talks with Congress , feeling that Biden had given too much away during previous negotiations .

Biden 's Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized again in 2013 . The act led to further related developments in the creation of the White House Council on Women and Girls , begun in the first term , as well as the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault , begun in January 2014 with Biden as co @-@ chair along with Jarrett .

As Iraq fell apart during 2014 , renewed attention was paid to the Biden @-@ Gelb Iraqi federalization plan of 2006 , with some observers suggesting that Biden had been right all along . Biden himself said that the U.S. would follow ISIL " to the gates of hell . "

By 2015 , a series of swearings @-@ in and other events where Biden placed his hands on women and girls and talked closely to them had attracted the attention of both the press and social media . In one case , a senator issued a statement afterward saying about his daughter , " No , she doesn 't think the vice president is creepy . " On January 17 , 2015 , secret service agents heard shots were fired as a vehicle drove near Biden 's Delaware residence at 8 : 28 p.m. outside the security perimeter , but the vice president and his wife , Jill were not home . A vehicle was observed by an agent leaving the scene at a high rate of speed .

On February 29 , 2016 , Biden gave a speech at the 88th Academy Awards to do with awareness for sexual assault ; he also introduced Lady Gaga .

= = = Death of Beau = = =

Almost 43 years after two family members died in an automobile accident , Biden and his family were struck by a second family tragedy on May 30 , 2015 : his son Beau died of brain cancer at age 46 , after battling it for several years. The nature and seriousness of the illness had not been previously disclosed to the public , and Biden had quietly reduced his public schedule in order to spend more time with his son , who at the time of his death had been widely seen as the frontrunner to be the Democratic nominee for Governor of Delaware in 2016 . The Vice President issued a statement saying , " The entire Biden family is saddened beyond words . "

= = 2016 presidential race = =

During much of his second term , Biden was said to be preparing for a possible bid for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination . He will be 74 on January 20 , 2017 , the date on which the successful candidate will be sworn in , which would have made him the oldest president on inauguration in history . With his family , many friends , and donors encouraging him in mid @-@ 2015 to enter the race , and with Hillary Clinton 's favorability ratings in decline at that time , Biden was reported to again be seriously considering the prospect and a " Draft Biden 2016 " PAC was established .

As of September 11 , 2015 , Biden was still uncertain whether or not to run . Biden cited the recent death of his son being a large drain on his emotional energy , and that " nobody has a right ... to seek that office unless they 're willing to give it 110 % of who they are . "

On October 21 , speaking from a podium in the Rose Garden with his wife and President Obama by his side , Biden announced his decision not to enter the race for the Democratic presidential nomination in the 2016 election . In January 2016 , Biden affirmed not running was the right decision , but he admitted to regretting not running for President " every day . "

As of the end of January 2016 , neither Biden nor President Barack Obama had endorsed any candidate for the 2016 presidential election . Biden did miss his annual Thanksgiving tradition of going to Nantucket , opting instead to travel abroad and meet with several European leaders , and took time to meet with Martin O 'Malley , having previously met with Bernie Sanders . Neither of these meetings were considered endorsements , as Biden has said that he will meet with any candidate who asks .

Following Obama 's endorsement of Hillary Clinton on June 9 , 2016 , Biden also endorsed her later the same day . Though Biden and Clinton were supposed to campaign together in Scranton on July 8 , the appearance was canceled by Clinton in light of the shooting of Dallas police officers the previous day .

= = Political positions = =

Biden has supported deficit spending on fiscal stimulus in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 ; the increased infrastructure spending proposed by the Obama administration ; mass transit , including Amtrak , bus , and subway subsidies ; same @-@ sex marriage ; and the reduced military spending proposed in the Obama Administration 's fiscal year 2014 budget .

A method that political scientists use for gauging ideology is to compare the annual ratings by the Americans for Democratic Action ( ADA ) with the ratings by the American Conservative Union ( ACU ) . Biden has a lifetime liberal 72 percent score from the ADA through 2004 , while the ACU awarded Biden a lifetime conservative rating of 13 percent through 2008 . Using another metric , Biden has a lifetime average liberal score of 77 @.@ 5 percent , according to a National Journal analysis that places him ideologically among the center of Senate Democrats as of 2008 . The Almanac of American Politics rates congressional votes as liberal or conservative on the political spectrum , in three policy areas : economic , social , and foreign . For 2005 ? 2006 , Biden 's average ratings were as follows : the economic rating was 80 percent liberal and 13 percent conservative , the social rating was 78 percent liberal and 18 percent conservative , and the foreign rating was 71 percent liberal and 25 percent conservative . This has not changed much over time ; his liberal ratings in the mid @-@ 1980s were also in the 70 ? 80 percent range .

Various advocacy groups have given Biden scores or grades as to how well his votes align with the positions of each group . The American Civil Liberties Union gives him an 80 percent lifetime score , with a 91 percent score for the 110th Congress . Biden opposes drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and supports governmental funding to find new energy sources . Biden believes action must be taken on global warming . He co @-@ sponsored the Sense of the Senate resolution calling on the United States to be a part of the United Nations climate negotiations and the Boxer @-@ Sanders Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act , the most stringent climate bill in the United States Senate . Biden was given an 85 percent lifetime approval rating from AFL @-@ CIO , and he voted for the North American Free Trade Agreement ( NAFTA ) .

December 8 , 2015 Joe Biden spoke in Ukraine 's parliament in Kiev .

= = Awards and honors = =

Biden has received honorary degrees from the University of Scranton ( 1976 ) , Saint Joseph 's University ( 1981 ) , Widener University School of Law ( 2000 ) , Emerson College ( 2003 ) , his alma mater the University of Delaware ( 2004 ) , Suffolk University Law School ( 2005 ) , and his other



alma mater Syracuse University ( 2009 ) .

Biden also received the Chancellor Medal from his alma mater , Syracuse University , in 1980 , and in 2005 , he received the George Arents Pioneer Medal ? Syracuse 's highest alumni award ? " for excellence in public affairs . "

In 2008 , Biden received the Best of Congress Award , for " improving the American quality of life through family @-@ friendly work policies , " from Working Mother magazine . Also in 2008 , Biden shared with fellow Senator Richard Lugar the Hilal @-@ i @-@ Pakistan award from the Government of Pakistan , " in recognition of their consistent support for Pakistan . " In 2009 , Biden received The Golden Medal of Freedom award from Kosovo , that region 's highest award , for his vocal support for their independence in the late 1990s .

Biden is an inductee of the Delaware Volunteer Firemen 's Association Hall of Fame . He was named to the Little League Hall of Excellence in 2009 .

= = Almanac = =

U.S. Senators are popularly elected and take office January 3 for a six @-@ year term ( except when appointed to fill existing vacancies ) .

= = Writings by Biden = =

= Émile Durkheim =

David Émile Durkheim ( French : [ emil dy?k?m ] or [ dy?kajm ] ; April 15 , 1858 ? November 15 , 1917 ) was a French sociologist , social psychologist and philosopher . He formally established the academic discipline and ? with Karl Marx and Max Weber ? is commonly cited as the principal architect of modern social science and father of sociology .

Much of Durkheim 's work was concerned with how societies could maintain their integrity and coherence in modernity ; an era in which traditional social and religious ties are no longer assumed , and in which new social institutions have come into being . His first major sociological work was *The Division of Labour in Society* ( 1893 ) . In 1895 , he published *The Rules of Sociological Method* and set up the first European department of sociology , becoming France 's first professor of sociology . In 1898 , he established the journal *L 'Année Sociologique* . Durkheim 's seminal monograph , *Suicide* ( 1897 ) , a study of suicide rates in Catholic and Protestant populations , pioneered modern social research and served to distinguish social science from psychology and political philosophy . *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ( 1912 ) presented a theory of religion , comparing the social and cultural lives of aboriginal and modern societies .

Durkheim was also deeply preoccupied with the acceptance of sociology as a legitimate science . He refined the positivism originally set forth by Auguste Comte , promoting what could be considered as a form of epistemological realism , as well as the use of the hypothetico @-@ deductive model in social science . For him , sociology was the science of institutions , if this term is understood in its broader meaning as " beliefs and modes of behaviour instituted by the collectivity " and its aim being to discover structural social facts . Durkheim was a major proponent of structural functionalism , a foundational perspective in both sociology and anthropology . In his view , social science should be purely holistic ; that is , sociology should study phenomena attributed to society at large , rather than being limited to the specific actions of individuals .

He remained a dominant force in French intellectual life until his death in 1917 , presenting numerous lectures and published works on a variety of topics , including the sociology of knowledge , morality , social stratification , religion , law , education , and deviance . Durkheimian terms such as " collective consciousness " have since entered the popular lexicon .

= = Biography = =

### == Childhood and education ==

Emile Durkheim was born in Épinal in Lorraine , the son of Mélanie ( Isidor ) and Moïse Durkheim . He came from a long line of devout French Jews ; his father , grandfather , and great @-@ grandfather had been rabbis . He began his education in a rabbinical school , but at an early age , he decided not to follow in his family 's footsteps and switched schools . Durkheim led a completely secular life . Much of his work was dedicated to demonstrating that religious phenomena stemmed from social rather than divine factors . While Durkheim chose not to follow in the family tradition , he did not sever ties with his family or with the Jewish community . Many of his most prominent collaborators and students were Jewish , and some were blood relations . Marcel Mauss , a notable social anthropologist of the pre @-@ war era , was his nephew . One of his nieces was Claudette ( née Raphael ) Bloch , a marine biologist and mother of Maurice Bloch , who became a noted anthropologist .

A precocious student , Durkheim entered the École Normale Supérieure ( ENS ) in 1879 , at his third attempt . The entering class that year was one of the most brilliant of the nineteenth century and many of his classmates , such as Jean Jaurès and Henri Bergson , would go on to become major figures in France 's intellectual history . At the ENS , Durkheim studied under the direction of Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges , a classicist with a social scientific outlook , and wrote his Latin dissertation on Montesquieu . At the same time , he read Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer . Thus Durkheim became interested in a scientific approach to society very early on in his career . This meant the first of many conflicts with the French academic system , which had no social science curriculum at the time . Durkheim found humanistic studies uninteresting , turning his attention from psychology and philosophy to ethics and eventually , sociology . He obtained his agrégation in philosophy in 1882 , though finishing next to last in his graduating class owing to serious illness the year before .

There was no way that a man of Durkheim 's views could receive a major academic appointment in Paris . From 1882 to 1887 he taught philosophy at several provincial schools . In 1885 he decided to leave for Germany , where for two years he studied sociology at the universities of Marburg , Berlin and Leipzig . As Durkheim indicated in several essays , it was in Leipzig that he learned to appreciate the value of empiricism and its language of concrete , complex things , in sharp contrast to the more abstract , clear and simple ideas of the Cartesian method . By 1886 , as part of his doctoral dissertation , he had completed the draft of his *The Division of Labour in Society* , and was working towards establishing the new science of sociology .

### == Academic career ==

Durkheim 's period in Germany resulted in the publication of numerous articles on German social science and philosophy ; Durkheim was particularly impressed by the work of Wilhelm Wundt . Durkheim 's articles gained recognition in France , and he received a teaching appointment in the University of Bordeaux in 1887 , where he was to teach the university 's first social science course . His official title was *Chargé d 'un Cours de Science Sociale et de Pédagogie* and thus he taught both pedagogy and sociology ( the latter had never been taught in France before ) . The appointment of the social scientist to the mostly humanistic faculty was an important sign of the change of times , and also the growing importance and recognition of the social sciences . From this position Durkheim helped reform the French school system and introduced the study of social science in its curriculum . However , his controversial beliefs that religion and morality could be explained in terms purely of social interaction earned him many critics .

Also in 1887 , Durkheim married Louise Dreyfus . They would have two children , Marie and André .

The 1890s were a period of remarkable creative output for Durkheim . In 1893 , he published *The Division of Labour in Society* , his doctoral dissertation and fundamental statement of the nature of

human society and its development . Durkheim 's interest in social phenomena was spurred on by politics . France 's defeat in the Franco -@-@ Prussian War led to the fall of the regime of Napoleon III , which was then replaced by the Third Republic . This in turn resulted in a backlash against the new secular and republican rule , as many people considered a vigorously nationalistic approach necessary to rejuvenate France 's fading power . Durkheim , a Jew and a staunch supporter of the Third Republic with a sympathy towards socialism , was thus in the political minority , a situation that galvanized him politically . The Dreyfus affair of 1894 only strengthened his activist stance .

In 1895 , he published *The Rules of Sociological Method* , a manifesto stating what sociology is and how it ought to be done , and founded the first European department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux . In 1898 , he founded *L 'Année Sociologique* , the first French social science journal . Its aim was to publish and publicize the work of what was , by then , a growing number of students and collaborators ( this is also the name used to refer to the group of students who developed his sociological program ) . In 1897 , he published *Suicide* , a case study that provided an example of what the sociological monograph might look like . Durkheim was one of the pioneers of the use of quantitative methods in criminology during his suicide case study .

By 1902 , Durkheim had finally achieved his goal of attaining a prominent position in Paris when he became the chair of education at the Sorbonne . Durkheim aimed for the Parisian position earlier , but the Parisian faculty took longer to accept what some called " sociological imperialism " and admit social science to their curriculum . He became a full professor ( Professor of the Science of Education ) there in 1906 , and in 1913 he was named Chair in " Education and Sociology " . Because French universities are technically institutions for training secondary school teachers , this position gave Durkheim considerable influence ? his lectures were the only ones that were mandatory for the entire student body . Durkheim had much influence over the new generation of teachers ; around that time he also served as an advisor to the Ministry of Education . In 1912 , he published his last major work , *The Elementary Forms of The Religious Life* .

= = = Death = = =

The outbreak of World War I was to have a tragic effect on Durkheim 's life . His leftism was always patriotic rather than internationalist ? he sought a secular , rational form of French life . But the coming of the war and the inevitable nationalist propaganda that followed made it difficult to sustain this already nuanced position . While Durkheim actively worked to support his country in the war , his reluctance to give in to simplistic nationalist fervor ( combined with his Jewish background ) made him a natural target of the now @-@ ascendant French Right . Even more seriously , the generations of students that Durkheim had trained were now being drafted to serve in the army , and many of them perished in the trenches . Finally , Durkheim 's own son , André , died on the war front in December 1915 ? a loss from which Durkheim never recovered . Emotionally devastated , Durkheim collapsed of a stroke in Paris on November 15 , 1917 . He was buried at the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris .

= = Durkheim 's thought = =

Throughout his career , Durkheim was concerned primarily with three goals . First , to establish sociology as a new academic discipline . Second , to analyze how societies could maintain their integrity and coherence in the modern era , when things such as shared religious and ethnic background could no longer be assumed ; to that end he wrote much about the effect of laws , religion , education and similar forces on society and social integration . Lastly , Durkheim was concerned with the practical implications of scientific knowledge . The importance of social integration is expressed throughout Durkheim 's work :

For if society lacks the unity that derives from the fact that the relationships between its parts are exactly regulated , that unity resulting from the harmonious articulation of its various functions assured by effective discipline and if , in addition , society lacks the unity based upon the commitment of men 's wills to a common objective , then it is no more than a pile of sand that the

least jolt or the slightest puff will suffice to scatter .

= = = Inspirations = = =

During his university studies at the École , Durkheim was influenced by two neo @-@ Kantian scholars , Charles Bernard Renouvier and Émile Boutroux . The principles Durkheim absorbed from them included rationalism , scientific study of morality , anti @-@ utilitarianism and secular education . His methodology was influenced by Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges , a supporter of the scientific method .

A fundamental influence on Durkheim 's thought was the sociological positivism of Auguste Comte , who effectively sought to extend and apply the scientific method found in the natural sciences to the social sciences . According to Comte , a true social science should stress for empirical facts , as well as induce general scientific laws from the relationship among these facts . There were many points on which Durkheim agreed with the positivist thesis . First , he accepted that the study of society was to be founded on an examination of facts . Second , like Comte , he acknowledged that the only valid guide to objective knowledge was the scientific method . Third , he agreed with Comte that the social sciences could become scientific only when they were stripped of their metaphysical abstractions and philosophical speculation . At the same time , Durkheim believed that Comte was still too philosophical in his outlook .

A second influence on Durkheim 's view of society beyond Comte 's positivism was the epistemological outlook called social realism . Although he never explicitly exposed it , Durkheim adopted a realist perspective in order to demonstrate the existence of social realities outside the individual and to show that these realities existed in the form of the objective relations of society . As an epistemology of science , realism can be defined as a perspective that takes as its central point of departure the view that external social realities exist in the outer world and that these realities are independent of the individual 's perception of them . This view opposes other predominant philosophical perspectives such as empiricism and positivism . Empiricists such as David Hume had argued that all realities in the outside world are products of human sense perception . According to empiricists , all realities are thus merely perceived : they do not exist independently of our perceptions , and have no causal power in themselves . Comte 's positivism went a step further by claiming that scientific laws could be deduced from empirical observations . Going beyond this , Durkheim claimed that sociology would not only discover " apparent " laws , but would be able to discover the inherent nature of society .

Scholars also debate the exact influence of Jewish thought on Durkheim 's work . The answer remains uncertain ; some scholars have argued that Durkheim 's thought is a form of secularized Jewish thought , while others argue that proving the existence of a direct influence of Jewish thought on Durkheim 's achievements is difficult or impossible .

= = = Establishing sociology = = =

Durkheim authored some of the most programmatic statements on what sociology is and how it should be practiced . His concern was to establish sociology as a science . Arguing for a place for sociology among other sciences he wrote :

Sociology is , then , not an auxiliary of any other science ; it is itself a distinct and autonomous science .

To give sociology a place in the academic world and to ensure that it is a legitimate science , it must have an object that is clear and distinct from philosophy or psychology , and its own methodology . He argued , " There is in every society a certain group of phenomena which may be differentiated from .... those studied by the other natural sciences . "

A fundamental aim of sociology is to discover structural " social facts " .

Establishment of sociology as an independent , recognized academic discipline is amongst Durkheim 's largest and most lasting legacies . Within sociology , his work has significantly influenced structuralism or structural functionalism . Scholars inspired by Durkheim include Marcel

Mauss , Maurice Halbwachs , Célestin Bouglé , Alfred Radcliffe @-@ Brown , Talcott Parsons , Robert K. Merton , Jean Piaget , Claude Lévi @-@ Strauss , Ferdinand de Saussure , Michel Foucault , Clifford Geertz , Peter Berger , Robert Bellah , social reformer Patrick Hunout and others .

= = = Methodology = = =

In The Rules of Sociological Method ( 1895 ) , Durkheim expressed his will to establish a method that would guarantee sociology 's truly scientific character . One of the questions raised by the author concerns the objectivity of the sociologist : how may one study an object that , from the very beginning , conditions and relates to the observer ? According to Durkheim , observation must be as impartial and impersonal as possible , even though a " perfectly objective observation " in this sense may never be attained . A social fact must always be studied according to its relation with other social facts , never according to the individual who studies it . Sociology should therefore privilege comparison rather than the study of singular independent facts .

Durkheim sought to create one of the first rigorous scientific approaches to social phenomena . Along with Herbert Spencer , he was one of the first people to explain the existence and quality of different parts of a society by reference to what function they served in maintaining the quotidian ( i.e. by how they make society " work " ) . He also agreed with his organic analogy , comparing society to a living organism . Thus his work is sometimes seen as a precursor to functionalism . Durkheim also insisted that society was more than the sum of its parts .

Unlike his contemporaries Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber , he focused not on what motivates the actions of individuals ( an approach associated with methodological individualism ) , but rather on the study of social facts .

= = = Social facts = = =

A social fact is every way of acting , fixed or not , capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint ; or again , every way of acting which is general throughout a given society , while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations .

Durkheim 's work revolved around the study of social facts , a term he coined to describe phenomena that have an existence in and of themselves , are not bound to the actions of individuals , but have a coercive influence upon them . Durkheim argued that social facts have , sui generis , an independent existence greater and more objective than the actions of the individuals that compose society . Only such social facts can explain the observed social phenomena . Being exterior to the individual person , social facts may thus also exercise coercive power on the various people composing society , as it can sometimes be observed in the case of formal laws and regulations , but also in situations implying the presence of informal rules , such as religious rituals or family norms . Unlike the facts studied in natural sciences , a " social " fact thus refers to a specific category of phenomena :

The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among the antecedent social facts and not among the states of the individual consciousness .

Such social facts are endowed with a power of coercion , by reason of which they may control individual behaviors . According to Durkheim , these phenomena cannot be reduced to biological or psychological grounds . Social facts can be material ( physical objects ) or immaterial ( meanings , sentiments , etc . ) . The latter cannot be seen or touched , but they are external and coercive , and as such , they become real , gain " facticity " . Physical objects can represent both material and immaterial social facts ; for example a flag is a physical social fact that often has various immaterial social facts ( the meaning and importance of the flag ) attached to it .

Many social facts , however , have no material form . Even the most " individualistic " or " subjective " phenomena , such as love , freedom or suicide , would be regarded by Durkheim as objective social facts . Individuals composing society do not directly cause suicide : suicide , as a social fact , exists independently in society , and is caused by other social facts ( such as rules governing

behavior and group attachment ) , whether an individual likes it or not . Whether a person " leaves " a society does not change anything to the fact that this society will still contain suicides . Suicide , like other immaterial social facts , exists independently of the will of an individual , cannot be eliminated , and is as influential ? coercive ? as physical laws such as gravity . Sociology 's task thus consists of discovering the qualities and characteristics of such social facts , which can be discovered through a quantitative or experimental approach ( Durkheim extensively relied on statistics ) .

= = = Society , collective consciousness and culture = = =

Regarding the society itself , like social institutions in general , Durkheim saw it as a set of social facts . Even more than " what society is " , Durkheim was interested in answering " how is a society created " and " what holds a society together " . In *The Division of Labour in Society* , Durkheim attempted to answer the question of what holds the society together . He assumes that humans are inherently egoistic , but norms , beliefs and values ( collective consciousness ) form the moral basis of the society , resulting in social integration . Collective consciousness is of key importance to the society , its requisite function without which the society cannot survive . Collective consciousness produces the society and holds it together , and at the same time individuals produce collective consciousness through their interactions . Through collective consciousness human beings become aware of one another as social beings , not just animals .

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own . It can be termed the collective or common consciousness .

In particular , the emotional part of the collective consciousness overrides our egoism : as we are emotionally bound to culture , we act socially because we recognize it is the responsible , moral way to act . A key to forming society is social interaction , and Durkheim believes that human beings , when in a group , will inevitably act in such a way that a society is formed .

The importance of another key social fact : the culture . Groups , when interacting , create their own culture and attach powerful emotions to it . He was one of the first scholars to consider the question of culture so intensely . Durkheim was interested in cultural diversity , and how the existence of diversity nonetheless fails to destroy a society . To that , Durkheim answered that any apparent cultural diversity is overridden by a larger , common , and more generalized cultural system , and the law .

In a socioevolutionary approach , Durkheim described the evolution of societies from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity ( one rising from mutual need ) . As the societies become more complex , evolving from mechanical to organic solidarity , the division of labour is counteracting and replacing collective consciousness . In the simpler societies , people are connected to others due to personal ties and traditions ; in the larger , modern society they are connected due to increased reliance on others with regard to them performing their specialized tasks needed for the modern , highly complex society to survive . In mechanical solidarity , people are self @-@ sufficient , there is little integration and thus there is the need for use of force and repression to keep society together . Also , in such societies , people have much fewer options in life . In organic solidarity , people are much more integrated and interdependent and specialisation and cooperation is extensive . Progress from mechanical to organic solidarity is based first on population growth and increasing population density , second on increasing " morality density " ( development of more complex social interactions ) and thirdly , on the increasing specialisation in workplace . One of the ways mechanical and organic societies differ is the function of law : in mechanical society the law is focused on its punitive aspect , and aims to reinforce the cohesion of the community , often by making the punishment public and extreme ; whereas in the organic society the law focuses on repairing the damage done and is more focused on individuals than the community .

One of the main features of the modern , organic society is the importance , sacredness even , given to the concept ? social fact ? of the individual . The individual , rather than the collective , becomes the focus of rights and responsibilities , the center of public and private rituals holding the

society together ? a function once performed by the religion . To stress the importance of this concept , Durkheim talked of the " cult of the individual " :

Thus very far from there being the antagonism between the individual and society which is often claimed , moral individualism , the cult of the individual , is in fact the product of society itself . It is society that instituted it and made of man the god whose servant it is .

Durkheim saw the population density and growth as key factors in the evolution of the societies and advent of modernity . As the number of people in a given area increase , so does the number of interactions , and the society becomes more complex . Growing competition between the more numerous people also leads to further division of labour . In time , the importance of the state , the law and the individual increases , while that of the religion and moral solidarity decreases .

In another example of evolution of culture , Durkheim pointed to fashion , although in this case he noted a more cyclical phenomenon . According to Durkheim , fashion serves to differentiate between lower classes and upper classes , but because lower classes want to look like the upper classes , they will eventually adapt the upper class fashion , depreciating it , and forcing the upper class to adopt a new fashion .

= = = Social pathologies and crime = = =

As the society , Durkheim noted there are several possible pathologies that could lead to a breakdown of social integration and disintegration of the society : the two most important ones are anomie and forced division of labour ; lesser ones include the lack of coordination and suicide . By anomie Durkheim means a state when too rapid population growth reduces the amount of interaction between various groups , which in turn leads a breakdown of understanding ( norms , values , and so on ) . By forced division of labour Durkheim means a situation where power holders , driven by their desire for profit ( greed ) , results in people doing the work they are unsuited for . Such people are unhappy , and their desire to change the system can destabilize the society .

Durkheim 's views on crime were a departure from conventional notions . He believed that crime is " bound up with the fundamental conditions of all social life " and serves a social function . He stated that crime implies , " not only that the way remains open to necessary changes but that in certain cases it directly prepares these changes . " Examining the trial of Socrates , he argues that " his crime , namely , the independence of his thought , rendered a service not only to humanity but to his country " as " it served to prepare a new morality and faith that the Athenians needed " . As such , his crime " was a useful prelude to reforms " . In this sense , he saw crime as being able to release certain social tensions and so have a cleansing or purging effect in society . He further stated that " the authority which the moral conscience enjoys must not be excessive ; otherwise , no one would dare to criticize it , and it would too easily congeal into an immutable form . To make progress , individual originality must be able to express itself ... [ even ] the originality of the criminal ... shall also be possible " .

= = = Suicide = = =

In Suicide ( 1897 ) , Durkheim explores the differing suicide rates among Protestants and Catholics , arguing that stronger social control among Catholics results in lower suicide rates . According to Durkheim , Catholic society has normal levels of integration while Protestant society has low levels . Overall , Durkheim treated suicide as a social fact , explaining variations in its rate on a macro level , considering society @-@ scale phenomena such as lack of connections between people ( group attachment ) and lack of regulations of behavior , rather than individuals ' feelings and motivations .

This study has been extensively discussed by later scholars and several major criticisms have emerged . First , Durkheim took most of his data from earlier researchers , notably Adolph Wagner and Henry Morselli , who were much more careful in generalizing from their own data . Second , later researchers found that the Protestant ? Catholic differences in suicide seemed to be limited to German @-@ speaking Europe and thus may have always been the spurious reflection of other factors . Durkheim 's study of suicide has been criticized as an example of the logical error termed

the ecological fallacy . However , diverging views have contested whether Durkheim 's work really contained an ecological fallacy . More recent authors such as Berk ( 2006 ) have also questioned the micro ? macro relations underlying Durkheim 's work . Some , such as Inkeles ( 1959 ) , Johnson ( 1965 ) and Gibbs ( 1968 ) , have claimed that Durkheim 's only intent was to explain suicide sociologically within a holistic perspective , emphasizing that " he intended his theory to explain variation among social environments in the incidence of suicide , not the suicides of particular individuals . "

Despite its limitations , Durkheim 's work on suicide has influenced proponents of control theory , and is often mentioned as a classic sociological study . The book pioneered modern social research and served to distinguish social science from psychology and political philosophy .

= = = Religion = = =

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* , Durkheim 's first purpose was to identify the social origin and function of religion as he felt that religion was a source of camaraderie and solidarity . His second purpose was to identify links between certain religions in different cultures , finding a common denominator . He wanted to understand the empirical , social aspect of religion that is common to all religions and goes beyond the concepts of spirituality and God .

Durkheim defined religion as

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things , i.e. , things set apart and forbidden--beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church , all those who adhere to them .

In this definition , Durkheim avoids references to supernatural or God . Durkheim argued that the concept of supernatural is relatively new , tied to the development of science and separation of supernatural ? that which cannot be rationally explained ? from natural , that which can . Thus , according to Durkheim , for early humans , everything was supernatural . Similarly , he points out that religions that give little importance to the concept of god exist , such as Buddhism , where the Four Noble Truths are much more important than any individual deity . With that , Durkheim argues , we are left with the following three concepts : the sacred ( the ideas that cannot be properly explained , inspire awe and are considered worthy of spiritual respect or devotion ) , the beliefs and practices ( which create highly emotional state ? collective effervescence ? and invest symbols with sacred importance ) , and the moral community ( a group of people sharing a common moral philosophy ) . Out of those three concepts , Durkheim focused on the sacred , noting that it is at the very core of a religion . He defined sacred things as :

... simply collective ideals that have fixed themselves on material objects ... they are only collective forces hypostasized , that is to say , moral forces ; they are made up of the ideas and sentiments awakened in us by the spectacle of society , and not of sensations coming from the physical world .

Durkheim saw religion as the most fundamental social institution of humankind , and one that gave rise to other social forms . It was the religion that gave humanity the strongest sense of collective consciousness . Durkheim saw the religion as a force that emerged in the early hunter and gatherer societies , as the emotions collective effervescence run high in the growing groups , forcing them to act in a new ways , and giving them a sense of some hidden force driving them . Over time , as emotions became symbolized and interactions ritualized , religion became more organized , giving a rise to the division between the sacred and the profane . However , Durkheim also believed that religion was becoming less important , as it was being gradually superseded by science and the cult of an individual .

Thus there is something eternal in religion that is destined to outlive the succession of particular symbols in which religious thought has clothed itself .

However , even if the religion was losing its importance for Durkheim , it still laid the foundation of modern society and the interactions that governed it . And despite the advent of alternative forces , Durkheim argued that no replacement for the force of religion had yet been created , . He expressed his doubt about modernity , seeing the modern times as " a period of transition and moral mediocrity " .



Durkheim also argued that our primary categories for understanding the world have their origins in religion . It is religion , Durkheim writes , that gave rise to most if not all other social constructs , including the larger society . Durkheim argued that categories are produced by the society , and thus are collective creations . Thus as people create societies , they also create categories , but at the same time , they do so unconsciously , and the categories are prior to any individual 's experience . In this way Durkheim attempted to bridge the divide between seeing categories as constructed out of human experience and as logically prior to that experience . Our understanding of the world is shaped by social facts ; for example the notion of time is defined by being measured through a calendar , which in turn was created to allow us to keep track of our social gatherings and rituals ; those in turn on their most basic level originated from religion . In the end , even the most logical and rational pursuit of science can trace its origins to religion . Durkheim states that , " Religion gave birth to all that is essential in the society .

In his work , Durkheim focused on totemism , the religion of the aboriginal Australians and Native Americans . Durkheim saw totemism as the most ancient religion , and focused on it as he believed its simplicity would ease the discussion of the essential elements of religion .

Durkheim 's work on religion was criticized on both empirical and theoretical grounds by specialists in the field . The most important critique came from Durkheim 's contemporary , Arnold van Gennep , an expert on religion and ritual , and also on Australian belief systems . Van Gennep argued that Durkheim 's views of primitive peoples and simple societies were " entirely erroneous " . Van Gennep further argued that Durkheim demonstrated a lack of critical stance towards his sources , collected by traders and priests , naively accepting their veracity , and that Durkheim interpreted freely from dubious data . At the conceptual level , van Gennep pointed out Durkheim 's tendency to press ethnography into a prefabricated theoretical scheme .

Despite such critiques , Durkheim 's work on religion has been widely praised for its theoretical insight and whose arguments and propositions , according to Robert Alun Jones , " have stimulated the interest and excitement of several generations of sociologists irrespective of theoretical ' school ' or field of specialization . "

= = = Sociology and philosophy = = =

= = = = Sociology of knowledge = = = =

While Durkheim 's work deals with a number of subjects , including suicide , the family , social structures , and social institutions , a large part of his work deals with the sociology of knowledge .

While publishing short articles on the subject earlier in his career ( for example the essay *De quelques formes primitives de classification* written in 1902 with Marcel Mauss ) , Durkheim 's definitive statement concerning the sociology of knowledge comes in his 1912 magnum opus *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* . This book has as its goal not only the elucidation of the social origins and function of religion , but also the social origins and impact of society on language and logical thought . Durkheim worked largely out of a Kantian framework and sought to understand how the concepts and categories of logical thought could arise out of social life . He argued , for example , that the categories of space and time were not a priori . Rather , the category of space depends on a society 's social grouping and geographical use of space , and a group 's social rythme that determines our understanding of time . In this Durkheim sought to combine elements of rationalism and empiricism , arguing that certain aspects of logical thought common to all humans did exist , but that they were products of collective life ( thus contradicting the *tabula rasa* empiricist understanding whereby categories are acquired by individual experience alone ) , and that they were not universal a priori 's ( as Kant argued ) since the content of the categories differed from society to society .

Another key elements to Durkheim 's theory of knowledge is his concept of *représentations collectives* ( collective representations ) , which is outlined in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* . *Représentations collectives* are the symbols and images that come to represent the ideas , beliefs , and values elaborated by a collectivity and are not reducible to individual constituents .

They can include words , slogans , ideas , or any number of material items that can serve as a symbol , such as a cross , a rock , a temple , a feather etc . As Durkheim elaborates , representations collectives are created through intense social interaction and are products of collective activity . As such these representations have the particular , and somewhat contradictory , aspect that they exist externally to the individual ( since they are created and controlled not by the individual but by society as a whole ) , and yet simultaneously within each individual of the society ( by virtue of that individual 's participation within society ) .

Arguably the most important " représentation collective " is language , which according to Durkheim is a product of collective action . And because language is a collective action , language contains within it a history of accumulated knowledge and experience that no individual would be capable of creating on their own . As Durkheim says , ' représentations collectives ' , and language in particular :

add to that which we can learn by our own personal experience all that wisdom and science which the group has accumulated in the course of centuries . Thinking by concepts , is not merely seeing reality on its most general side , but it is projecting a light upon the sensation which illuminates it , penetrates it and transforms it .

As such , language , as a social product , literally structures and shapes our experience of reality . This discursive approach to language and society would be developed by later French philosophers , such as Michel Foucault .

= = = = Morality = = = =

Durkheim defines morality as " a system of rules for conduct . " His analysis of morality is strongly marked by Immanuel Kant and his notion of duty . While Durkheim was influenced by Kant , he was highly critical of aspects of the latter 's moral theory and developed his own positions .

Durkheim agrees with Kant that within morality , there is an element of obligation , " a moral authority which , by manifesting itself in certain precepts particularly important to it , confers upon [ moral rules ] an obligatory character . " Morality tells us how to act from a position of superiority . There exists a certain , pre @@ established moral norm to which we must conform . It is through this view that Durkheim makes a first critique of Kant in saying that moral duties originate in society , and are not to be found in some universal moral concept such as the categorical imperative . Durkheim also argues that morality is characterized not just by this obligation , but is also something that is desired by the individual . The individual believes that by adhering to morality , they are serving the common Good , and for this reason , the individual submits voluntarily to the moral commandment .

However , in order to accomplish its aims , morality must be legitimate in the eyes of those to whom it speaks . As Durkheim argues , this moral authority is primarily to be located in religion , which is why in any religion one finds a code of morality . For Durkheim , it is only society that has the resources , the respect , and the power to cultivate within an individual both the obligatory and the desirous aspects of morality .

= = Influences and legacy = =

Durkheim had an important impact on the development of Anthropology and Sociology , influencing thinkers from his school of sociology , such as Marcel Mauss , but also later thinkers , such as Maurice Halbwachs , Talcott Parsons , Alfred Radcliffe @@ Brown , and Claude Levi @@ Strauss . More recently , Durkheim has influenced sociologists such as Steven Lukes , Robert Bellah , and Pierre Bourdieu . His description of collective consciousness also deeply influenced the Turkish nationalism of Ziya Gökalp , the founding father of Turkish sociology .

Outside of sociology , he influenced philosophers Henri Bergson and Emmanuel Levinas , and his ideas can be found latently in the work of certain structuralist thinkers of the 60s , such as Alain Badiou , Louis Althusser , and Michel Foucault . Recently , Durkheim has influenced philosophers such as Charles Taylor and Hans Joas .

= = = Durkheim contra Searle = = =

Much of Durkheim 's work , however , remains unacknowledged in philosophy , despite its direct relevance . As proof one can look to John Searle , who wrote a book *The Construction of Social Reality* , in which he elaborates a theory of social facts and collective representations that he believed to be a landmark work that would bridge the gap between analytic and continental philosophy . Neil Gross however , demonstrates how Searle 's views on society are more or less a reconstitution of Durkheim 's theories of social facts , social institutions , collective representations and the like . Searle 's ideas are thus open to the same criticisms as Durkheim 's . Searle responded by saying that Durkheim 's work was worse than he had originally believed , and , admitting that he had not read much of Durkheim 's work , said that , " Because Durkheim 's account seemed so impoverished I did not read any further in his work . " Stephen Lukes , however , responded to Searle 's response to Gross and refutes point by point the allegations that Searle makes against Durkheim , essentially upholding the argument of Gross , that Searle 's work bears great resemblance to that of Durkheim 's . Lukes attributes Searle 's miscomprehension of Durkheim 's work to the fact that Searle , quite simply , never read Durkheim .

= = Selected works = =

Montesquieu 's contributions to the formation of social science ( 1892 )

*The Division of Labour in Society* ( 1893 )

*The Rules of Sociological Method* ( 1895 )

*On the Normality of Crime* ( 1895 )

*Suicide* ( 1897 )

*The Prohibition of Incest and its Origins* ( 1897 ) , published in *L 'Année Sociologique* , vol . 1 , pp. 1 ? 70

*Sociology and its Scientific Domain* ( 1900 ) , translation of an Italian text entitled " *La sociologia e il suo dominio scientifico* "

*Primitive Classification* ( 1903 ) , in collaboration with Marcel Mauss

*The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ( 1912 )

*Who Wanted War ?* ( 1914 ) , in collaboration with Ernest Denis

*Germany Above All* ( 1915 )

Published posthumously :

*Education and Sociology* ( 1922 )

*Sociology and Philosophy* ( 1924 )

*Moral Education* ( 1925 )

*Socialism* ( 1928 )

*Pragmatism and Sociology* ( 1955 )