

Joe Biden: A Historical Biography

Introduction

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr., born November 20, 1942, has spent more than half a century in American public life. He rose from modest beginnings in Scranton, Pennsylvania, to become a six-term U.S. Senator, the 47th Vice President of the United States under Barack Obama, and ultimately the 46th President of the United States. Biden's career is marked by resilience, personal tragedy, and a reputation for empathy, but also by political controversy and partisan battles.

Biden's story is that of a man who, despite repeated setbacks, continually returned to the political stage. He is both one of the longest-serving figures in Washington and, as of his inauguration in January 2021, the oldest man to assume the presidency.

Chapter 1: Early Life and Education

Joe Biden was born in Scranton, a working-class city in northeastern Pennsylvania. His father, Joseph Biden Sr., faced financial hardship but eventually found stability as a used-car salesman. His mother, Catherine Eugenia "Jean" Finnegan Biden, instilled in her children a deep sense of faith and perseverance.

Biden has often spoken of his childhood struggles with stuttering, which made him the target of teasing. He overcame it by reciting poetry in front of a mirror, later reflecting:

"Stuttering gave me insight into other people's pain. I learned that you can make people feel better with just a little bit of kindness."

The family moved to Claymont, Delaware, when Joe was 10. He attended Archmere Academy, a Catholic prep school, where he became a standout halfback on the football team. He later studied at the University of Delaware, graduating in 1965 with a double major in history and political science.

Biden pursued a law degree at Syracuse University, graduating in 1968. That same year, he married Neilia Hunter, with whom he would have three children: Beau, Hunter, and Naomi.

Chapter 2: The Young Senator

Biden began his political career on the New Castle County Council in Delaware. In 1972, at just 29 years old, he ran for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Republican J. Caleb Boggs. Running

as a fresh-faced challenger, Biden campaigned on civil rights, the environment, and opposition to the Vietnam War. Against the odds, he won.

But tragedy struck weeks later. In December 1972, his wife Neilia and infant daughter Naomi were killed in a car accident, and his sons Beau and Hunter were critically injured. Biden considered giving up politics, but colleagues urged him to continue. He was sworn into the Senate in 1973 at his sons' hospital bedsides.

Biden often recalled advice from his father during that dark period:

“When you get knocked down, you get up. Get up.”

He went on to serve six terms in the Senate, becoming Delaware's longest-serving senator.

Chapter 3: The Senate Years

Biden's Senate career spanned 36 years, during which he built a reputation as a pragmatic legislator. He served on the Foreign Relations and Judiciary Committees, chairing both at different times.

Judiciary Committee

As chair, Biden oversaw two of the most contentious Supreme Court confirmation hearings in modern history. In 1987, he led the rejection of Robert Bork's nomination, arguing that Bork's judicial philosophy was too extreme. In 1991, he presided over Clarence Thomas's confirmation, which became explosive after Anita Hill accused Thomas of sexual harassment. Biden faced criticism for how he handled the hearings, with some arguing he failed to adequately support Hill.

Foreign Relations

Biden was deeply involved in foreign policy. He supported NATO expansion, engaged with arms control issues, and was a strong advocate of U.S. intervention in the Balkans during the 1990s. He also voted in favor of the 2002 resolution authorizing the Iraq War—a decision he later described as a mistake.

Bipartisan Reputation

Throughout his Senate years, Biden cultivated a reputation for working across the aisle. He was known for his gregarious personality and empathy, often bonding with colleagues through shared hardships. “Politics, at its best, is personal,” he once said.

Chapter 4: Presidential Aspirations

Biden first ran for president in 1988. Initially considered a strong contender, his campaign collapsed after accusations of plagiarism in speeches, as well as revelations that he had exaggerated his academic record.

He ran again in 2008 but failed to gain traction in a field dominated by Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Despite this, Obama admired Biden's foreign policy expertise and his ability to connect with working-class voters. After securing the Democratic nomination, Obama chose Biden as his running mate.

Chapter 5: Vice President of the United States (2009–2017)

As vice president, Biden became one of the most influential holders of the office in U.S. history.

The Obama-Biden Partnership

Obama valued Biden's experience in Congress and foreign affairs. Biden often served as a bridge to lawmakers, drawing on decades of Senate relationships. He was also a frequent voice in policy debates within the administration.

Obama said of Biden:

“There's no one I trust more.”

Economic Crisis and Recovery

Taking office amid the Great Recession, Biden oversaw the implementation of the 2009 Recovery Act, a massive stimulus package designed to save and create jobs. Biden was praised for managing the program with relatively little fraud or abuse.

Foreign Policy

Biden traveled extensively, representing the administration abroad. He played a role in shaping U.S. policy on Iraq, advocating for a long-term federal solution, though the plan was not adopted.

A Father's Loss

During Obama's second term, tragedy struck again when Biden's eldest son, Beau, died of brain cancer in 2015. Biden wrote about the experience in his memoir *Promise Me, Dad*, which captured his grief and resilience. Beau's death influenced Biden's decision not to run for president in 2016, despite strong support. He later said:

“Beau should be the one running for president, not me.”

Chapter 6: The 2020 Campaign

In April 2019, Biden announced his candidacy for the 2020 presidential election. Framing the race as a “battle for the soul of America,” he pledged to restore civility and decency to politics.

The Democratic primaries were turbulent, with Biden performing poorly in early contests. His campaign revived with a decisive victory in South Carolina, thanks in large part to African American voters and endorsements from party leaders. He consolidated support and won the nomination.

The general election against Donald Trump unfolded amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Biden campaigned largely virtually, promoting mask-wearing and vaccine development while criticizing Trump’s handling of the crisis.

In November 2020, Biden won the presidency with over 81 million votes, the most in U.S. history. He captured 306 Electoral College votes to Trump’s 232. After Trump refused to concede, Biden’s victory was certified following the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

Chapter 7: The Biden Presidency

Year One: 2021

Biden took office on January 20, 2021, amid pandemic restrictions and heightened security. His inaugural address called for unity:

“We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue.”

In his first months, Biden signed a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill, expanded vaccine distribution, and rejoined the Paris Climate Agreement. He also withdrew U.S. troops from Afghanistan, ending America’s longest war but facing backlash after the chaotic evacuation from Kabul.

Year Two: 2022

In 2022, Biden faced economic challenges as inflation surged. His approval ratings declined amid high gas prices and supply chain disruptions.

Still, he achieved legislative victories, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which invested in clean energy and prescription drug price reforms.

Democrats outperformed expectations in the midterms, holding the Senate, a result seen as a validation of Biden's strategy of moderation.

Year Three: 2023

Biden focused on implementing legislation and strengthening alliances abroad. He took a leading role in supporting Ukraine after Russia's 2022 invasion, sending military aid and rallying NATO allies.

At home, debates over immigration, gun control, and debt ceiling negotiations tested his leadership. His age—already the oldest president—remained a constant subject of debate.

Year Four: 2024

Biden formally announced his reelection campaign, arguing that democracy itself was at stake against Donald Trump's attempted comeback. He emphasized his legislative record, handling of the pandemic, and defense of global democracy.

The election became a rematch of 2020, with Biden once again framing himself as a steady alternative to Trump's chaos.

Chapter 8: Personal Life and Character

Biden's public image is shaped by empathy and resilience. His personal tragedies—the loss of his first wife, daughter, and later his son—resonated with many Americans. Supporters see him as a leader who understands grief and hardship.

Critics, however, point to verbal gaffes, questions about his stamina, and controversies surrounding his son Hunter Biden. Biden's long record of political compromise also earns mixed reviews in an era of polarization.

Chapter 9: Historical Assessment

Joe Biden's legacy is still unfolding. His presidency has been marked by both significant achievements and persistent challenges. He passed some of the largest domestic spending bills in decades, restored alliances abroad, and presided over strong job growth post-pandemic.

Yet he faces criticism over inflation, immigration, and his handling of Afghanistan. His age and style—seen by some as outdated—raise questions about generational change in leadership.

Biden once said:

“Don’t tell me what you value. Show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.”

By that measure, his presidency emphasizes infrastructure, climate action, healthcare affordability, and global engagement.

Conclusion

Joe Biden’s life is a story of persistence through adversity. From a stuttering boy in Scranton to the Oval Office, his journey embodies both personal resilience and the enduring appeal of a political figure rooted in empathy. Whether history remembers him primarily for his legislative achievements, his leadership during crisis, or his struggle against populism, Biden’s half-century in public life secures his place in the American story.