**A midterm quandary**

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With midterm polls in the US today, President Joe Biden, exacerbating the apprehensions of his fellow partymen about a dreadful rout, is still sticking to his new political experiment of a “low profile and accomplishment-driven” campaign.

Unlike his archrival Donald Trump, who spearheaded a high-octane campaign with a recycled old presidential theme, President Biden surprisingly adopted a very different strategy to win voters’ support: desisting from large rallies that are normally an integral part of election campaigns and relying entirely on the media coverage of his ‘accomplishments’. Too much criticism within the Democratic Party has been directed at Biden’s go-low approach.

Trump’s extremely aggressive campaigning, for obvious reasons, has literally flustered the majority of Democrats, who feel that Biden is committing a blunder by adopting an atypical campaign strategy. Democrats are in an acute state of anxiety. If this low-profile campaign fails to stop the Republicans from regaining control of one or both houses of Congress, an outcome that would definitely reshape politics in America, President Biden must be ready for one of the biggest rebukes of his political career.

Too much is at stake for President Biden. Poor performance in the midterm polls will practically dash the possibilities of much-needed legislation to support the crucial points of his presidential agenda like abortion rights, gun control, police reform, voting rights or tax fairness. The Congressional midterm contest today is not just about the election of 435 members of the House of Representatives and 35 members of the Senate, it will also define the future texture of American politics.

Sensing the strategic importance of these polls, Trump has put all his energies into creating a bulky thrust to grab maximum share in the Congress. Republicans have been holding bug rallies in all the constituencies. Similarly, Trump has crisscrossed the country for near-weekly rallies drawing huge crowds. Former vice president Mike Pence has also spent time in the territories of more than 30 candidates for Congress and governor’s mansions.

The midterm polls have witnessed a replay of the ruthless and fierce contest between the two in 2018. Trump has been using the same tone and tenor of language as in 2018; that could amount to charging the Democrats and Biden with treason. Trump is continuously alleging that Biden and the Democrats are making the US vulnerable to foreign influence and are weakening America by turning it into a socialist country. On the other hand, Biden and the Democrats are accusing the Republicans and Trump of racism and extremism, including repeatedly using the word “fascism” to highlight the dangers of right-wing politics in America.

Visibility is a critical aspect of the traditional Congressional campaigns, and Trump has been trying to be the most visible person in the race. He has used this campaign as a launching-pad to renew his prospects of contesting in the 2024 presidential elections. On the other hand, Biden has conspicuously abstained from major political gatherings and rallies. He has been practically non-visible, concentrating more on media talks to project his performance. He is trying to portray himself as a successful leader by highlighting his key achievements such as rebuilding infrastructure in America, negotiated drug prices, student debt relief and investments in computer chip manufacturing.

President Biden, according to his close team, has made it a point, in order to differentiate himself from Trump, to promote his party’s accomplishments in the last two years in the media as the main plank of his election campaign instead of traditional speeches at big rallies. Biden thinks that the best strategy to get people excited and motivated about supporting the Democrats is to show them what he has been able to accomplish on their behalf. He has stuck to this strategy very sincerely despite intense opposition from the Democrats.

While defending his low-key election campaign, Biden’s advisers have asserted that he has carefully crafted this strategy to fit his personal brand as a national and mature leader who is above the political fray. President Biden believes that he has delivered much more than his predecessors in a short span and his achievements are sufficient enough to sail him and his party through the midterm polls with emphatic numbers. He is of the view that, instead of traditional political rallies where politicians are expected to make unrealistic and exaggerated claims and promises, official venues and events provide a better opportunity to highlight his accomplishments – and thus attract headlines on an almost daily basis.

This is quite an atypical strategy when viewed against the long history of high-octane and high-voltage election campaigns in American politics that depend much on hoopla and fanfare than serious political discourse and debate on key national issues. A big chunk of voters is still undecided, and the effectiveness of Biden’s go-low strategy would be divulged only today. But most Democrats are seriously sceptical.

At the same time, President Biden, being an average political orator when it comes to rebutting an insolent and rude opponent like Trump, also did not want to indulge into the repetition of the ferocity of the 2018 presidential campaign and pushed former president Barack Obama to take the lead in political rallies in some targeted states. Biden has made many gaffes during the current campaign, and has rightly avoided more exposure to larger public rallies. With his witty and calm demeanor, Barack Obama has all the ingredients to neutralize the more glamorous and piquant gimmicks of Donald Trump.

Obama has focused on Atlanta, Detroit and Milwaukee as a special project to campaign for Democratic candidates. There is no doubt that Obama, considered to be one of the most persuasive and influential Democratic leaders who can enhance the voter base of the political left in America, was the right choice to counter the growing nuisance of Donald Trump. Obama has been at loggerheads with Trump when he withdrew from the Paris Agreement and Iran nuclear deal. Similarly, in May 2020, both were again engaged in a short-lived personal skirmish when Obama criticized Trump’s handling of the Covid-19 crisis.

Trump is desperate to reclaim his political mandate in this contest for the Congress. He considers himself the bigger crowd-puller and is quite justified in bragging about the large crowds attending his rallies, even overshadowing the candidates he is soliciting votes for. His narrative has been quite catchy and is built on the concept that Biden and the Democrats have caused serious damage to the economy, and both should be punished through votes. In this, Trump is looking to use today’s midterm polls as a catalyst for his much-desired comeback in 2024.

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