

## Missing the Point – “It’s all the shootings, stupid!”

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President Joe Biden, looking too old and missing the point. (Shutterstock)

It used to be that incumbent Presidents and other high-ranking elected officials had an advantage over the candidates running to replace them. Not so much anymore.

The “Incumbent Problem,” as I like to call it, is a lot like dating. So, you’ve met someone with whom you’ve been going out for a while. You have a relationship, but where’s it going and how long will it last?

*“I’m not sure I’m interested in taking relationship advice from someone who writes a column called ‘Missing the Point.’”*

And I don’t blame you. For the record, it’s an analogy, not advice. I’ll pick up the pace and get to my point... I have a rule that applies to both personal and political relationships. When things are going well, nothing matters. When things are going poorly, everything counts.

For example, the woman of your dreams drops by unexpectedly late one evening on her way home from a long day at the office that included a wilted fast-food salad she had for dinner. Standing there in the doorway of your apartment, she looks exhausted, but somehow beautifully disheveled, her blouse partially untucked, her hair nowhere near as perfectly styled as when she arrived at work early that morning. She drops her backpack computer case, sighs and smiles with having to say out loud how glad she is

to see you. The smile is perfect – except for the piece of broccoli stuck between two of her front teeth that you notice but couldn't care less about.

On the other hand, had you not been so glad to see her, it doesn't matter why, that moment at the door would probably have gone very differently. Maybe it doesn't even have anything to do with your relationship, but other things going on in your life that aren't breaking your way. Nowadays, it could be just the onslaught of disturbing and otherwise bad news that has been streaming into your head from every device you own.

*“Been there, done that.”*

Yeah, me too. In fact, that's how I came up with my rule. If you're anxious... If you're struggling or annoyed for whatever reasons, it's going to impact every relationship you have. We like to think we compartmentalize, but we don't. At best, it's an imperfect process.

Given President Biden's extraordinary accomplishments in just the first two years he's been in office, you'd think his re-election would be assured. But it's not. Quite to the contrary, [new Biden polling](#) shows voter dissatisfaction with our President at record levels and that's despite the economy being at virtually full employment. Without question – particularly given that he took over the Presidency during a pandemic and his having to put up with a Federal Reserve hellbent on suppressing economic growth to curb inflation – Joe Biden has had an impressive, in some respects spectacular first two years in office.

And yet, in response to some questions asked in [the same polling](#), he's actually running well behind his former opponent, Donald Trump. That's right, he's polling behind a person who is intellectually, psychologically, ethically and legally “challenged.” But then the poll isn't a measure of facts carefully considered by prospective voters, is it? No. It's just a sign of how upset people are with Joe Biden – and would be with any incumbent in his singular position.

So why is his standing in the polls so poor? Well, his age is certainly a factor. He's old and doddering. It's not a good look for someone we want to believe is the leader of the free world. And Joe never has been a great speaker. But then we were anxious to get Trump out of the White House and willing to overlook candidate Joe's shortcomings when we thought we were electing a single term “transitional President.”

No. There's something else going on that's affecting the mood of American voters, perhaps more than we think. Is it the climate crisis? Probably not because it's too remote a concept. American voters like more immediate crises, like a home invasion in the middle of the night. The pandemic is mostly in our rearview mirrors, so that's not it either. Lingering concerns about Putin using tactical nuclear weapons to win a war he never should have started before he's removed from office, one way or another? No.

A potential invasion of Taiwan by the Chinese? Nah. Americans don't really pay attention to that kind of stuff.

Make no mistake about it. Almost everything we hear and see on 24x7 cable and other media from which we get our news is making us anxious, craving relief no matter what the cost. There's something else going on that's personal, relative to which we're experiencing a more visceral reaction. Something, long simmering in the backs of brains, that is finally getting our attention.

Figure it out yet? ...It's fear. Palpable fear. To paraphrase [James Carville's classic admonition](#) to Bill Clinton, "It's all the shootings, stupid!" Joe can run as many commercials as he can afford, touting his program accomplishments, it's not going to make any difference.

People are not oblivious to hearing about gun violence as some analysts are saying. People are upset. What the heck, I'm upset. What with all the shootings we've been having across the country, I'm starting to worry about the safety of my children, my grandchildren and my wife. The threat that used to be random and at a distance seems to be getting closer and closer to home.

I find myself thinking about the security or lack thereof at the schools they attend and other places they go – and find myself wondering what we, as a nation, and I can do to better protect them. I don't understand why military style weapons haven't been outlawed. I'm disturbed by politicians and ordinary citizens alike who believe the Second Amendment is somehow a license, even a mandate to bear these awful guns, [which it isn't](#).

Mostly, I'm just worried, shaken by the thought that one of my family might be trashed, literally obliterated by some errant nutball. I'm having trouble getting these shootings – [more than 200 mass shootings](#) so far this calendar year, not to mention all the other individual murders that have become routine in our major cities – out of my head.

*"Maybe we shouldn't be watching so much news?"*

That "ignorance is bliss" is only an illusion. Quite to the contrary, being ignorant of a problem changes nothing for the better.

And so, consciously and subconsciously, we blame all our elected officials, from the President on down. They've had all the time in the world, years, decades, to outlaw military weapons for personal use and take other, related steps to stop the carnage. "They've failed," we say to ourselves. "Time to give the next contestant, some other candidate, a chance to get the job done."

For me and millions of other Americans, Democrats included, it's no longer a matter of respecting what Joe Biden has accomplished. It's about which candidate for President

can give us the peace of mind and calm that comes from taking it for granted that our children and grandchildren are safe.

Why is Joe so far down in the polls? Why are his disapproval ratings so high, even among Democrats, despite his accomplishments and the strength of our economy? There are many reasons, of course, but it's primarily because voting is largely an emotional decision. Because it's only human nature to blame our incumbents for whatever is bothering us – even if only subconsciously – and to support their opponents who make the hopeful promises we want to hear.

-Les Cohen

Les Cohen is a long-term Marylander, having grown up in Annapolis. Professionally, he writes and edits materials for business and political clients from his base of operations in Columbia, Maryland. He has a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Economics. Leave a comment or feel free to send him an email to [Les@Writeaway.us](mailto:Les@Writeaway.us).

