

Democrats' Choice: Run on Biden's Record or Run Against the Orange Boogeyman

Joe Biden may think he's doing a great job and that if, by chance, anything has gone wrong during his presidency, it's somebody else's fault. But the American people aren't buying it.

A new poll by Gallup has the president at his lowest approval rating since he took office. Only 43 percent of the American people approve of the job he's doing while, for the first time, a majority – 53 percent – disapprove.

And while Democrats overwhelmingly support the president – 90 percent – even that's not as good as it sounds. At the height of his popularity almost everybody who identified as a Democrat – 98 percent – said they approved of the way he was handling his job.

But in these hyper-partisan times, independents are the ones who really matter. And there's bad news on that front for the president. Only 37 percent of independents approve of the president's performance in office – his lowest number so far, 24 points below his personal high of 61 percent.

Polls, of course, aren't etched in stone. They can change tomorrow. But if the numbers don't change, Democrats are going to have a tough time running on the president's record in next year's midterm elections.

So what to do? It looks like Democrats already have an answer to that: Run against Donald Trump.

It worked in 2020, after all. Voters didn't elect Joe Biden because they thought he was especially smart or that he was a

statesman with great ideas. They voted for him because he wasn't Donald Trump. They voted for him because they had grown weary of Trump's chaos.

So if running against Trump worked in 2020, why not try it again? And they did just that – a few weeks ago in California. For a while polling in September's recall election was close. Then Gov. Gavin Newsom decided not to run on his record – or even against Larry Elder, the leading GOP candidate. Instead Newsom figured he'd run against Donald Trump who wasn't on the ballot but is something akin to a toxic waste dump as far as most of California's voters are concerned.

At a rally on September 7, Newsom said, "Larry Elder not only supported Donald Trump, he's to the right of Donald Trump."

Then one week later, on the last day of the election, President Biden told a rally in Long Beach, California that Elder is "The clone of Donald Trump," before asking: "Can you imagine him being governor of this state?"

Voters could not. More than 62 percent voted not to recall the governor. Newsom won. Trump lost.

Which brings us to another race for governor; this one in Virginia set for November 2.

Two days after the results of the California vote were in, there was a debate in Virginia between the Democratic candidate Terry McAuliffe and his Republican opponent, Glenn Youngkin. The moderator asked McAuliffe: "Why have so many of your paid ads and your rhetoric mentioned Trump in an election focused on the people of Virginia and an election that presumably should be focused on your own proposals for what you would do as governor?"

"Because my opponent is a Trump wannabe," McAuliffe replied.

Odds are McAuliffe won't be the last Democrat to run against

Donald Trump.

The midterm elections in 2018 were a referendum on Donald Trump. Democrats took over the House. As we mentioned, the 2020 presidential election was another referendum on Trump. Democrats won that one, too. Then in January of this year it looked like Republicans would win at least one of the two Senate races in Georgia, if not both. But Donald Trump made the election about – who else? – himself, and the Democrats won both seats.

And so next year, Democrats will have a choice: run on Joe Biden's record or run against their favorite boogeyman. Some decisions are hard. This one is easy.

Even if Trump decides to pack up and leave Mar-a-Lago for Timbuktu, he'll still be the center of attraction as November 2022 approaches. Democrats loathe the man but they can't seem to get enough of him. For them, he's a gift that keeps on giving.

One more thing: A new poll by the Pew Research Center found that a majority of Americans – 56 percent – don't believe that President Biden is "mentally sharp." That's an 11-point drop in the same poll since March.

It's one thing if voters don't like any particular policy this president has put forward. But if they see him as weak, or not in command, or too old to do the job – if they see him as not "mentally sharp" – that's something else altogether.

Again, poll numbers are simply an indication of how voters feel about what's going on at the moment. Numbers can change. But are we really supposed to believe that Joe Biden – who will turn 79 in November – will be more "mentally sharp" as time goes by?

Anything is possible. But if the perception of him doesn't change for the better then no amount of Trump bashing is

likely to save the Democrats next year.