



BIDEN ENDS TERRIBLE 2021 WITH COVID SURGE, BUILD BACK BETTER STALLED, AFGHANISTAN IN CRISIS

Description

USA: President [Joe Biden](#) is ending his first year in office under less than ideal circumstances as [Democrats](#) look to hold onto power in the 2022 midterms.

"You got to hope it's a nowhere to go but up situation," Paul Maslin, a top Democratic pollster, told Newsweek. "His fundamental problem is the country is still not feeling good about itself, and it's on his watch now."

The administration is still dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, aftermath from the [U.S. military's](#) chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and one of the president's key agenda items—the sweeping \$1.7 trillion Build Back Better Act—stalled after opposition from a critical Democratic senator.

And as the year comes to an end, Biden's approval rating among voters has declined considerably after he entered office with ratings in the high 50s.

A new survey from NPR, [PBS](#) NewsHour and Marist College found that Biden's approval rating sank to 41 percent, a new low for him in the poll. Fifty-five percent of adults in the U.S. disapprove of the job Biden is doing as president.

"Time can change things. We may just sort of step back and say, 'What happened this first year?'" Maslin continued. "[Biden] said, essentially, I know what I'm doing, I'll calm the country down, I'll beat this pandemic, I'll restore the economy. And here we are, after a messy withdrawal from Afghanistan, can't get his major legislation through his own party, pandemic raging again, inflation spiking.... So of course he's gonna suffer from all that."

Omicron Variant Fueling the Latest Coronavirus Surge

After pledging in his inaugural speech to “defeat the virus,” Biden delivered a second massive relief package in March. The American Rescue Plan provided \$1,400 direct payments, \$350 billion in aid to state and local governments, \$14 billion for vaccine distribution and expanded the Child Tax Credit benefit.

But the administration has been hit with two major variants: the Delta variant, which drove a summer surge of hospitalizations and deaths, and now the highly transmissible Omicron strain of the virus is quickly spreading through the nation.

Omicron was first detected in the U.S. on December 2 and has since been reported in 47 states. The highly transmissible variant is causing a strain on hospital systems, with [more than 20 states with ICUs at 80 percent capacity](#). Earlier this month, the country surpassed 800,000 deaths from the virus.

Michael Ceraso, executive director of Winning Margins and former campaigner for [Bernie Sanders](#), told Newsweek that he thinks the Biden administration has “done a good job with COVID” but the public is worn out after nearly two years of the crisis.

“If you’re a day-to-day human, you’re tired,” Ceraso said. “People are getting tested multiple times, you’re seeing long lines, people are freaking out about this next wave. There’s nothing you can do right now other than just be a public servant.”

Afghanistan’s Humanitarian Crisis

Biden was bashed by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle over the execution of the withdrawal of American troops from the nation, which deteriorated quickly after the [Taliban](#)’s rapid takeover.

Months later, the administration is facing pressure to do more as Afghanistan faces economic and humanitarian crises. The [United Nations](#) estimated only 5 percent of the nation will have sufficient food this winter, and that 97 percent of the population could face poverty.

The Associated Press reported Tuesday that hundreds of people were protesting near the U.S. embassy in Kabul, holding signs saying things such as “Let us eat” and calling for the administration to release billions of dollars in frozen assets.

House Democrats sent a letter to administration officials to step in to stop the country’s economic collapse. “We don’t want to help the Taliban, but we don’t want to see Afghans starving in the winter either,” the representatives wrote.

Build Back Better Legislation Hits Major Roadblock

Build Back Better was pared down from its original \$3.5 trillion price tag to \$1.7 trillion amid months of negotiations that have resulted in some key provisions, such as the Clean Electricity Performance Program and free community college, being gutted.

Still, Biden announced in late October that a deal had been reached on a framework for the bill. The House of Representatives then passed the legislation in November along party lines, and Biden saw another legislative success that month when [Congress](#) approved a \$1 trillion infrastructure law.

But the Build Back Better package, a cornerstone of Biden's domestic agenda, appeared all but dead on Sunday after Senator [Joe Manchin](#) announced he couldn't vote yes on the bill.

Manchin's opposition prompted scorn from the administration and his Democratic colleagues, with the White House calling it an "inexplicable reversal." Without Manchin's vote, the bill can't pass the 50-50 divided [Senate](#).

Senate Majority Leader [Chuck Schumer](#) vowed to bring the legislation to the floor for a vote in early January, despite Manchin's recent remarks, and the White House has said Biden will "work like hell" to get results in the new year.

"Right now Biden's fighting himself, fighting his own party, fighting the difficulties of the world and the country at the end of 2021 and he's suffering for it," Maslin said.

Operatives said passing some version of Build Back Better is critical for Democrats ahead of next year's contentious midterm elections.

"No one's excited about another coronavirus surge during the holiday break," said Ceraso. "No one's excited that they can't be campaigning on their second part of their Build Back Better legislation. I think it presents a challenge, and I think the best political leaders are prepared for unforeseen challenges."

Newsweek reached out to the White House for comment but didn't receive a response before publication.

.....

by Alexandra Hutzler is currently a staff writer on Newsweek's politics team. Prior to joining Newsweek in summer 2018, she was a crime and politics reporter for The Riverdale Press in the Bronx. She graduated from Manhattan College in 2018.

Date Created
12/28/2021