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Presented by:

BAALI Smain & BENTOUMI Samy

Supervised by: Dr. BENNAA Youcef

Topic

The United States Presidency between
Dementia and Wisdom
| Revisiting the Politics of Age in the post-Trump Era |

The Panel of examiners:

	Full name	University	Role
01	Dr.Hamoudi Aboubakr	Msila University	Chairperson
02	Dr.Bennaâ Youcef	Msila University	Supervisor
03	Dr. Sahed Bachir	Msila University	Examiner

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DEDICATION

We thank Allah, the Almighty, who has blessed us with the gifts of intellect and religion. He who said in the precise revelation.

And the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "If someone does you a favor, then repay him. If you cannot find anything with which to repay him, then pray for him until you think that you have repaid him" (reported by Abu Dawood).

We especially offer our praises to the noble family.

Also, in loyalty, appreciation, and acknowledgment of their generosity, we extend our heartfelt thanks to those devoted individuals who spared no effort in assisting us in the field of scientific research. We particularly mention the professor who supervised this study and who has been instrumental in guiding us and assisting in the collection of research material, may Allah reward him with all goodness.

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Remember, acknowledging people's efforts is akin to thanking Allah, and you all certainly deserve recognition. Without your hard work, our institution wouldn't have reached its prestigious position.

Thank you, and let's keep moving forward..

Abstract

This study explores the impact of age-related issues on presidential leadership, with a focus on historical precedents, theoretical models, and contemporary case studies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. By analyzing the cognitive abilities and media portrayals of these leaders, we gain insights into how age and mental health influence public perception and political narratives. Historical case studies of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan provide context for understanding the long-standing relevance of age in presidential health. Theoretical frameworks on aging and cognition are employed to elucidate the complex interplay between aging, cognitive decline, and decision-making in high-stress environments. The study further examines the role of media bias and public reaction in shaping the discourse around presidential fitness. Implications for future presidential candidates of advanced age are discussed, highlighting the need for balanced and ethical approaches to evaluating their cognitive and physical health.

Keywords : Age-related Issues , Cognitive Health , Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Presidential Leadership , United States Presidency .

الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تأثير القضايا المتعلقة بالسن على القيادة الرئاسية، مع التركيز على السوابق التاريخية والنماذج النظرية ودراسات الحالة المعاصرة لدونالد ترامب وجو بايدن. من خلال تحليل القدرات الإدراكية وتصوير وسائل الإعلام لهؤلاء القادة، نكتسب رؤى حول كيفية تأثير العمر والصحة العقلية على تصور الجمهور والسرديات السياسي.

توفر دراسات الحالة التاريخية لأبراهام لينكولن وفرانكلين ديلاانو روزفلت ورونالد ريغان سياقاً لفهم الأهمية طويلة الأمد للعمر في الصحة الرئاسية. يتم استخدام الأطر النظرية حول الشيخوخة والإدراك لتوضيح التفاعل المعقد بين الشيخوخة والانحدار الإدراكي واتخاذ القرارات في البيئات عالية الضغط.

كما تفحص الدراسة دور التحيز الإعلامي ورد الفعل العام في تشكيل الخطاب حول اللياقة الرئاسية. يتم مناقشة الآثار المترتبة على المرشحين الرئاسيين المستقبليين المتقدمين في السن، مما يبرز الحاجة إلى نهج متوازن وأخلاقي لتقييم صحتهم الإدراكية والجسدية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رئاسة الولايات المتحدة، القيادة الرئاسية، القضايا المتعلقة بالسن، السلامة الإدراكية، دونالد ترامب، جو بايدن

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General Introduction

Summary of Literature

The literature on age and political leadership encompasses various domains including gerontology, cognitive aging, and political science. Scholars have long debated the influence of age on leadership effectiveness, often focusing on the balance between the wisdom that comes with experience and the potential cognitive decline associated with aging.

The landscape of political leadership is continually evolving, influenced by numerous factors that shape public perception and the effectiveness of governance. One significant aspect that has garnered increasing attention is the age of political leaders. In recent years, particularly in the wake of the Trump presidency, there has been a heightened focus on how age affects a leader's capability to govern and the public's perception of their leadership. This period has been marked by a polarized political climate and a diverse range of opinions on what constitutes effective leadership.

As societies grapple with these changes, it becomes essential to delve deeper into understanding the role of age in political leadership. Age can bring a wealth of experience and wisdom, potentially enhancing a leader's ability to navigate complex political landscapes. Conversely, it can also raise concerns about cognitive decline and the physical demands of high office. These dual facets of age present a complex dynamic that warrants thorough investigation.

This study builds on these foundations, exploring how age-related factors influence perceptions and effectiveness of presidential leadership in the post-Trump era.

Aims

- The first objective of this study is to investigate the impact of age on the perceptions and effectiveness of presidential leadership in the post-Trump era. This involves examining how different age groups view the capabilities and performance of presidents and how these perceptions influence overall leadership effectiveness. By analyzing various data points and public opinions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between a president's age and their perceived ability to lead effectively in contemporary political contexts.
- The second objective is to explore the duality of age in political leadership, particularly focusing on the balance between the potential for wisdom and the risks of cognitive

decline. This aspect of the study delves into how aging affects a leader's decision-making processes and public image. It seeks to identify the advantages that come with experience and maturity, while also considering the challenges posed by aging, such as potential cognitive impairments. Through this exploration, the study aims to offer insights into how age-related factors can influence political leadership and the strategies that can be employed to mitigate any negative impacts.

Objectives

- To provide a theoretical foundation for this study, a comprehensive review of existing research on gerontology, cognitive aging, and political leadership will be conducted. This review will lay the groundwork by synthesizing key findings and theories that explore how aging influences cognitive functions and leadership capabilities.
- The study will analyze case studies of recent U.S. presidents, specifically focusing on Donald Trump and Joe Biden, to understand the practical implications of age on their leadership. By examining their presidencies, this analysis will shed light on how age-related factors have influenced their decision-making processes, public perception, and overall effectiveness as leaders.
- Media representations and public discourse surrounding the age and cognitive health of presidential candidates and officeholders will be examined. This examination will provide insights into how media coverage and societal attitudes impact the public's view of older political leaders and the narratives that shape these perceptions.
- Finally, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on the ideal age for presidential candidates and its implications for future political leadership. By addressing this topic, the research will offer valuable perspectives on age-related criteria in political candidacy and the broader implications for the governance and leadership of the nation.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

Given this context, an important question arises: **How does age impact the perceptions and effectiveness of presidential leadership in the post-Trump era?** This question seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which age influences both the public's view of their leaders and the actual performance of those in presidential roles. By exploring this question, we aim to shed light on the broader implications of age in political leadership and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the qualities essential for effective governance.

Sub-Questions.

1. What are the theoretical perspectives on the relationship between age, cognitive health, and political leadership?
2. How have recent U.S. presidents, specifically Donald Trump and Joe Biden, been perceived in terms of their age and cognitive capabilities?
3. In what ways do media representations influence public discourse on the age and cognitive health of presidential candidates?
4. How does the duality of age-related wisdom and cognitive decline shape policy-making and governance?

Methodology: Qualitative Approach

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with a strong qualitative component to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of age on presidential leadership. The methodology includes:

1. **Literature Review** . An extensive review of existing research on gerontology, cognitive aging, and political leadership to establish a theoretical framework.
2. **Case Studies**. Detailed case studies of recent U.S. presidents, particularly Donald Trump and Joe Biden, to explore the practical implications of age on leadership and public perception.
3. **Media Analysis**. Qualitative analysis of media content to understand how age-related issues are portrayed and debated in public discourse.

The study is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of age on presidential leadership through a detailed exploration of historical, theoretical, and contemporary perspectives.

Chapter One: Historical Context and Theoretical Framework. sets the stage by delving into the historical background of age-related issues in U.S. political leadership and reviewing the theoretical underpinnings from gerontology and cognitive aging studies. This chapter lays the foundation for understanding the duality of age-related wisdom and cognitive

Chapter Two: The Trump Era and Its Aftermath, Biden and Beyond. transitions to a contemporary analysis, focusing on the presidencies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. This chapter examines how age influenced their leadership styles, public perceptions, and media representations, providing insights into the ongoing debates about the ideal age for presidential candidates in the post-Trump political landscape.

Chapter One

Historical Context and Theoretical Framework

Introduction :

Throughout the tapestry of American history, the age of U.S. presidents at the time of their presidency has been a topic of intrigue and examination. This aspect of presidential history offers a fascinating lens through which to explore leadership, experience, and the evolution of public perception over time.

Presidents of the United States have assumed the highest office at a wide range of ages, presenting a diverse array of challenges and opportunities based on their life stages. The age of a president at inauguration has implications not only for the individual's approach to governance and policy but also reflects the societal norms and expectations of the era. As we delve into the ages of past U.S. presidents, we uncover stories of youthful vigor and seasoned wisdom, each bringing unique contributions to the nation's legacy³.

This exploration serves not just as a chronological account but as a deeper understanding of how age and leadership interplay in the shaping of American history.

³ The White House Official website, Presidents, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/>, Seen : 05/04/2024.

1_ Presidential Age-related Data

As set out in Article Two of the U.S. Constitution, there is a clear mandate that anyone assuming the presidency must be 35 or older when they take the oath of office. On average, the typical inauguration age for presidents of the United States hovers around 55. As a point of historical note, the record for the youngest appointed president is held by Theodore Roosevelt, who stepped into the role at 42 years old following the tragic assassination of William McKinley.

Contrastingly, the oldest individual to be sworn in as president was Joe Biden, who took the presidential oath at an advanced age of 78⁴. Reflecting on the untimely events that have cut presidential terms short, John F. Kennedy stands out as the president with both the youngest exit from office, at 46 due to assassination, and the briefest overall lifespan amongst his peers in the presidential canon.

Theodore Roosevelt, who left office at the age of 50, earned the distinction of being the youngest to ever hold the title of "former president." Meanwhile, Ronald Reagan had completed his presidency at 77,⁵ marking him as the oldest serving president until the present, with Joe Biden poised to break that record, currently being 81 years old⁶.

Turning our gaze to post-presidential life, we learn that James K. Polk had the briefest period of retirement, passing away from cholera a mere 103 days following the conclusion of his term, at just 53, the youngest age of natural death amongst the presidents.

⁴ Merrill, Dave; Caronello, Sophie (January 19, 2021). "Biden to Become Oldest President Ever at Inauguration". Bloomberg News. Archived from the original on January 28, 2021. Retrieved January 21, 2021

⁵ James Polk". biography.com. A&E Television Networks. October 24, 2019 [April 2, 2014]. Retrieved January 24, 2021

⁶ Diaz, Johnny (January 18, 2021) [Updated January 20, 2021]. "Biden Is the Oldest President to Take the Oath". The New York Times. Archived from the original on December 28, 2021. Retrieved January 24, 2021

On the flip side of this morose statistic is Jimmy Carter, who enjoys the longest retirement span in the history of America's commanders-in-chief, extending beyond 43 years, and at 99, Carter is also the eldest of the six living past presidents and the longest-lived of all past presidents to date. **Barack Obama**, comparatively a more recent president, is presently the youngest living ex-president at the age of 62⁷.

With considerations on the optimal age for the U.S. presidency, Americans seem to favor candidates in their 50s, as highlighted by a **Pew Research Center study**⁸. Looking back, this preference is mirrored in the historical data, with the majority of presidents ceremoniously entering office in their fifth decade.

On the day they first vowed to serve, the standard age for U.S. presidents has been 55, striking a balance between youth and experience. On one end of the spectrum stood **Theodore Roosevelt**, a youthful and energetic leader at 42 when he assumed office in 1901, and on the other, Joe Biden, with decades of service behind him, was 78 at his inauguration in 2021.

Not surprisingly, age drifts upward for presidents securing a second term. With a median second-inauguration age of 58 for the 21 presidents who've seen a second term, the trend may continue with Joe Biden seeking reelection at 81 for the 2024 campaign, alongside his predecessor **Donald Trump**, who is 77.

Diving deeper into the inauguration age patterns, a slight majority—35 out of 68—of these political apex ceremonies have been graced by individuals in their 50s. The instances drop as we consider presidents in their 60s (19 times), or their 40s (10), and even

⁷ Raymond, Jonathan (January 20, 2021). "Jimmy Carter, unable to make inauguration, saluted by President Biden in remarks". WXIA-TV. Archived from the original on June 11, 2021. Retrieved January 31, 2021.

⁸ Katherine Schaeffer, Most U.S. presidents have been in their 50s at inauguration, Short Reads | October 10, 2023, Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/10/10/most-us-presidents-have-been-in-their-50s-at-inauguration/>

more so for septuagenarians, with just four such occurrences. However, it's crucial to recognize that these figures must be weighed against the backdrop of an increasing life expectancy in the United States over the centuries ⁹.

Parallel to their presidential counterparts, the typical age for vice presidents taking their inaugural oath has also been 55. The range spans from the rather young John C. Breckinridge at 36, serving under James Buchanan in 1857, to Alben W. Barkley at a seasoned 71 years during Harry Truman's presidency in 1949.

When interpreting the findings, it is important to consider not only numerical age but also the impact of age on quality of life, including mental illness and health. Young leaders can bring energy and new vision, while older presidents can offer experience and expertise. However, age and leadership play an important role; Each president balances intellectual strength with experience, all of which are viewed by the public as important to the mental health and intellectual well-being of their leaders.

2_ Case Studies:

2_1_ Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln [February 12, 1809 – April 15, 1865] was an American lawyer, politician, and statesman who served as the 16th president of the United States from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. Lincoln led the United States through the American Civil War, defending the nation as a constitutional union, defeating the insurgent Confederacy, playing a major role in the abolition of slavery, expanding the power of the federal government, and modernizing the U.S. economy.

⁹ Katherine Schaeffer | Mentioned | 2023, Pew Research Center.

Abraham Lincoln's health has been the subject of both contemporaneous commentary and subsequent **hypotheses** by historians and scholars. Until middle age, his health was fairly good for the time. He contracted **malaria** in 1830 and 1835; the latter was the worse of the two cases. He contracted smallpox in 1863 during an 1863 to 1864 epidemic in Washington, D.C.¹⁰.

Throughout his life he experienced periods of depression, which could have been genetic, due to life experiences or trauma, or both. Lincoln took blue mass pills, which contained mercury. Based on his behavior and physical condition while taking the pills and after he quit taking them, Lincoln may have suffered from mercury poisoning. It has been theorized that Lincoln had Marfan syndrome or Multiple endocrine neoplasia type 2B, both rare genetic diseases¹¹.

Robert Siegel talks with **Joshua Wolf** Shenk, author of *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness*.

'In January 1841, a young Abraham Lincoln suffered his second breakdown. He collapsed, and was treated by a doctor who may have done him more harm than good. A new book explores how the Illinois lawyer went on to become president despite suffering from lifelong depression'¹².

"When you read the reminiscences of Lincoln's friends and you hear him described in their terms, he's always the most depressed person they've every seen. It's always this radical gloom that they were shocked by," Shenk says.

¹⁰ Sotos, John G. , *The Physical Lincoln Sourcebook*, ISBN:978-0-9818193-3-4 , Publication Date: Aug 2008, Publisher: Mount Vernon Book Systems.

¹¹ Miller, Richard Lawrence (2006). *Lincoln and His World*. Stackpole Books. p. 61. ISBN 978-0-8117-0187-7.

¹² Robert Siegel & Joshua Wolf, *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness*.

The standard way to investigate biological predisposition is simply to list the cases of mental illness -- or mental characteristics suggestive of potential illness -- in a family. With Lincoln, such a family history suggests that he came by his depression, at least in part, by old-fashioned inheritance. His parents, Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, came from Virginia families that crossed the Appalachian Mountains into Kentucky in the late eighteenth century. They married in 1806 and had three children: Sarah, born February 10, 1807; Abraham, born February 12, 1809; and Thomas, born about 1811. Though our information is imperfect, to say the least, both parents had characteristics suggestive of melancholy. Nearly all the descriptions of Nancy Lincoln have her as sad. For example, her cousin John Hanks said her nature "was kindness, mildness, tenderness, sadness." And Lincoln himself described his mother as "intellectual, sensitive and somewhat sad."

Tom Lincoln, a farmer and carpenter, was a social man with a talent for jokes and stories, but he, too, had a somber streak. "He seemed to me," said his step grandson, "to border on the serious -- reflective." This seriousness could tip into gloom. According to a neighbor in Kentucky, he "often got the 'blues,' and had some strange sort of spells, and wanted to be alone all he could when he had them." During these spells he would spend as much as half a day alone in the fields or the woods. His behavior was strange enough to make people wonder if Tom Lincoln was losing his mind ¹³.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of mental trouble in Abraham Lincoln's family comes from his paternal relations. His great-uncle once told a court of law that he had "a deranged mind." His uncle Mordecai Lincoln had broad mood swings, which were probably intensified by his heavy drinking. And Mordecai's family was thick with mental disease. All three of his sons -- who bore a strong physical resemblance to their first cousin Abraham -- were considered melancholy men. One settler who knew both the future president and his cousins spoke of the two "Lincoln characteristics": "their moody spells and great sense of

humor." One of these Lincoln cousins swung wildly between melancholia and mania and at times had a tenuous grip on reality, writing letters and notes that suggest madness. Another first cousin of Lincoln's had a daughter committed to the Illinois State Hospital for the Insane. After a trial, a jury in Hancock County committed thirty-nine-year-old Mary Jane Lincoln to the hospital, noting that "her disease is of thirteen years duration." At the hospital, an attendant observed, "Her father was cousin to Abraham Lincoln, and she has features much like his."

2_2_ Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (January 30, 1882 – April 12, 1945), commonly known by his initials FDR, was an American politician who served as the 32nd president of the United States from 1933 until his death in 1945. He is the only U.S. president to have served more than two terms. His initial two terms were centered on combating the Great Depression, while his third and fourth saw him shift his focus to America's involvement in World War II.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, who later served as the 32nd president of the United States from 1933 to 1945, began experiencing symptoms of a paralytic illness in 1921 at the age of 39. His symptoms included fevers, paralysis that started in the lower body and moved upwards symmetrically, facial paralysis, issues with bowel and bladder function, numbness, increased sensitivity to stimuli, and a recovery pattern that started from the upper body and moved downwards. He received a diagnosis of poliomyelitis and underwent extensive therapy, including hydrotherapy at Warm Springs, Georgia. As a result of the illness, Roosevelt was left paralyzed from the waist down and relied on a wheelchair and leg braces for mobility, which he made efforts to conceal when in public. In 1938, he established the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which played a significant role in the development of

polio vaccines. While historical accounts continue to refer to Roosevelt's condition as polio, some modern medical experts have questioned this diagnosis and proposed Guillain-Barré syndrome as an alternative explanation¹³.

After falling ill, Roosevelt was examined by four doctors. Eben Homer Bennet, the family doctor, diagnosed him with a severe cold. William Keen, a retired neurosurgeon, suspected a blood clot. Robert Lovett, an expert in orthopedic management of children with poliomyelitis, diagnosed him with "infantile paralysis," which was also the diagnosis given by George Draper, Roosevelt's personal physician¹⁴.

Interestingly, none of Roosevelt's physicians mentioned Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) as a possible diagnosis, indicating that they were not aware of it as a distinct disease at the time. Reports of GBS before 1921 were primarily published by European physicians in European journals, and very few American physicians were familiar with it. Lovett, for example, mistakenly believed that Landry's ascending paralysis (a form of GBS) was a clinical presentation of paralytic polio. In 1921, it was commonly assumed by American physicians that sudden non-traumatic flaccid paralysis was due to paralytic polio. The recognition of GBS as a separate disease did not become widely accepted in the United States until after World War II¹⁵.

On April 29, 1926, he bought Warm Springs with the intention of making it into a rehabilitation center for polio patients¹⁶.

¹³ Goldman AS, Schmalstieg EJ, Freeman DH, Goldman DA, Schmalstieg FC (2003). "What was the cause of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's paralytic illness?" (PDF). *Journal of Medical Biography*. 11 (4): 232–40.

¹⁴ Goldman AS, Schmalstieg EJ, Dreyer CF, Schmalstieg FC, Goldman DA (2016). "Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR's) (1882–1945) 1921 neurological disease revisited; the most likely diagnosis remains Guillain–Barré syndrome". *Journal of Medical Biography*. 24 (4): 452–59. doi:10.1177/0967772015605738. PMID 26508622. S2CID 29859133.

¹⁵ Goldman, Armond S.; Goldman, Daniel A. (2017). *Prisoners of Time: The Misdiagnosis of FDR's 1921 Illness*. EHDP Press. ISBN 978-1939824035.

¹⁶ Gallagher, Hugh (1994). *FDR's Splendid Deception*. Arlington, VA: Vandamere Press. ISBN 0918339332

2_3_ Ronald Reagan

Ronald Wilson Reagan [February 6, 1911 – June 5, 2004] was an American politician and actor who served as the 40th president of the United States from 1981 to 1989. A member of the Republican Party, his presidency constituted the Reagan era, and he is considered one of the most prominent conservative figures in American history.

Reagan was inaugurated as the 40th president of the United States on Tuesday, January 20, 1981. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger administered the presidential oath of office ¹⁷.

- **Health Status**

From the beginning of his presidency, Reagan began wearing a hearing aid, initially in his right ear and later in both ears. His decision to publicly disclose his hearing difficulties and use of hearing aids in 1983 led to a significant increase in their sales.

On July 13, 1985, Reagan underwent surgery at Bethesda Naval Hospital to remove a cancerous polyp from his colon. He temporarily delegated presidential powers to the vice president for a period of eight hours, following a procedure similar to the 25th Amendment that he had previously declined to invoke. The operation lasted only three hours and was successful. Reagan resumed presidential duties later that day. In August of the same year, he underwent another operation to remove cancerous tissue from his nose. In October, additional cancerous tissue was discovered in his nose and removed.

In January 1987, Reagan underwent surgery for prostate swelling that raised concerns about his health. However, no cancerous tissue was found, and he was not put

¹⁷ Woodard, J. David (2012). Ronald Reagan: A Biography. Greenwood Publishing Group. ISBN 978-0-313-39638-0

under anesthesia during the operation. In July 1987, he underwent a third operation to remove cancerous cells from his nose.

In August 1994, Reagan, then 83 years old, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease¹⁸, a progressive and irreversible neurodegenerative disease of the brain tissue that leads to the loss of mental functions, particularly memory. In November, he publicly announced his illness in a handwritten letter, in which he wrote¹⁹:

"[...] I have recently been told that I am one of the millions of Americans who will be afflicted with Alzheimer's disease... At the moment, I feel just fine. I intend to live the remainder of the years God gives me on this Earth doing the things I have always done... I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead. Thank you, my friends. May God bless you."

After this announcement, Reagan received numerous messages of support at his home in California, but there were also speculations about his condition during his presidency. In her memoir, former CBS White House correspondent Lesley Stahl recounted her last meeting with the president in 1986: "Reagan didn't seem to know who I was... I thought he was senile. I was going to have to report to my fellow citizens that the president of the United States was out of his mind." However, Reagan regained his lucidity at the end of the interview.²⁰ As Stahl wrote, "I was this close to reporting that Reagan was senile." Nevertheless, Dr. Lawrence K. Altman, a physician employed as a journalist by The New York Times, noted that "the distinction between mere forgetfulness and the onset of Alzheimer's can be fuzzy," and Reagan's four physicians at the White House declared that

¹⁸ Cannon, Lou (2000) [1991]. *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*. PublicAffairs. ISBN 978-1-891620-91-1.

¹⁹ "Reagan's doctors deny covering up Alzheimer's His mental status in office never in doubt, they say". *The New York Times*. October 5, 1997. Retrieved April 20, 2021 – via *The Baltimore Sun*.

²⁰ "Nancy Reagan Reflects on Ronald". *CNN*. March 4, 2001. Archived from the original on October 23, 2012. Retrieved April 6, 2007.

there were no signs of the disease during his presidency. Dr. John E. Hutton, Reagan's physician from 1984 to 1989, stated in 1997 that the president showed "absolutely no signs of dementia or Alzheimer's." Reagan occasionally experienced memory lapses, particularly with names. During a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, he repeatedly referred to Vice President Bush as "Prime Minister Bush." However, Reagan's doctors noted that he only began showing symptoms of the disease towards the end of 1992 or 1993, several years after his presidency. His former Chief of Staff James Baker considered the idea that Reagan slept during cabinet meetings as "grotesque." Other members of his team, former aides, and friends stated that they had seen no indications suggesting that the president had Alzheimer's.²¹

Several U.S. Presidents have experienced mental health issues to varying degrees, and mental health diagnoses and discussions were not as prevalent during earlier presidencies, so it's possible that other presidents may have also experienced mental health issues but were not formally diagnosed or reported.

²¹ Altman, Lawrence K (October 5, 1997). "Reagan's Twilight – A special report; A President Fades Into a World Apart". The New York Times. Archived from the original on May 1, 2021. Retrieved May 1, 2021.

3_ Theoretical Framework:

3_1_ Theoretical Models of Aging and Cognition.

Although a substantial literature has shown that older adults evidence declines on standard laboratory measures of cognition as compared with younger adults, other work has suggested that normal elderly people can and do maintain intact or even superior performance on a number of everyday tasks ²².

An important theoretical distinction that may inform our understanding of why older adults do well on some cognitive tasks but not others involve the distinction between effortful and automatic processes. Effortful or controlled processing requires substantial mental resources and occurs in situations where the individual must deliberately search for information from memory, actively manipulate information, or consciously attempt to solve a problem. In contrast, automatic processing requires little or no mental capacity to perform and may develop as a result of repeated experience (e.g., driving a car). The classic pattern of findings with regard to age and cognition is one of age declines in tasks requiring effortful processing versus age invariance in tasks relying predominantly on automatic processes, with growth occurring across the life span in knowledge structures such as vocabulary and world knowledge²³.

There are pronounced age declines in effortful processing, which largely reflects the fact that older adults have fewer cognitive resources available for such processing as compared with younger adults. Several indices of effortful processing resource have been proposed, and the best index is still of some debate in the cognitive aging literature (see Park, 2000, for a review). For example, older adults generally process information more slowly than

²² Scott C. Brown and Denise C. Park, *Theoretical Models of Cognitive Aging and Implications for Translational Research in Medicine*.2003.

²³ Craik & Jennings; Light, *Human memory and aging*. 1992

younger adults, and this reduced rate of processing is posited to be a fundamental cause of age differences in cognitive performance. Speed of processing is measured in the laboratory by how many perceptual judgments a person can make in a specified time frame. (e.g., deciding whether two letter strings are the same) ²⁴.

Another proposed index of processing resource is working memory capacity, or the amount of information a person can simultaneously process and store in consciousness. Working memory, or one's "mental desktop," also declines with age (Park et al., 1996) and is measured by tasks in which participants answer questions about material presented while simultaneously having to remember aspects of this material. Finally, other workers have argued that there are age declines in inhibition, or the ability to direct attention away from irrelevant information, and that this inhibitory deficit accounts for the decreased cognitive performance of older adults.

Basic abilities such as speed of processing, working memory, and inhibition can be thought of as building blocks of cognition because they are fundamental for understanding individual differences, and age differences, in many cognitive tasks. Decreases in speed of processing and working memory place limits on long-term episodic memory, or retention of information beyond a few minutes, as well as other important mental activities such as comprehension, reasoning, and problem solving. As a result of age declines in basic cognitive resources, older adults show deficits on types of memory that are effortful, such as recall tasks, which require the individual to remember information with minimal cues in the environment to support retrieval operations. In addition, explicitly remembering source information, or the specific context in which information was presented, is a resource-intensive activity that also evidences age declines.

²⁴ Juhel, Jacques. (January 2003). Vieillesse normale et inhibition cognitive. [Normal aging and cognitive inhibition] P 126-162.

Normal aging in adults has notable effects on performance in many domains of human cognition. These effects are experienced by older individuals who frequently complain of difficulties with concentration or memory problems. They can also be objectively observed through tasks involving attention, memory, reasoning, or problem-solving. Age-related differences are less pronounced in long-term memory compared to episodic memory. They are less evident in language use than in spatial abilities or the implementation of complex cognitive strategies. These differences are less significant and occur later in individuals with higher levels of education compared to those with lower levels of education, and so on. This differential sensitivity of human cognition to the effects of aging, which is likely rooted in the relationship between brain aging and cognitive aging, can be interpreted in various ways depending on the level of observation and preferred functional explanation ²⁵.

3_2_ Aging and Medical Decision Making

Another critical medical behavior where one might expect cognitive aging to play an important role is medical decision making. Are normal older adults disadvantaged in making important medical decisions as a result of age-related declines in effortful cognitive processes such as comprehension and recall? (Md. Marson & Harrell, 1999)

Zwahr, Park, and Shifren (1999) asked 102 women, ages 20 to 80, to read materials on the pros and cons of estrogen replacement therapy and then to decide whether a hypothetical patient should use the therapy to treat her menopausal symptoms. These authors reported that, due to age declines in basic processing resources, the older women considered fewer treatment options, made fewer comparative judgments among choices, and had an overall lower quality of rationale for their decisions, as compared with younger women.

²⁵ Juhel, Jacques | Mentioned | [Normal aging and cognitive inhibition] P 168-171.

However, despite showing age differences in decision-making processes, the two age groups made similar types of medical decisions in the end²⁶. Moreover, the older women in this study were more likely to reach an immediate decision as compared with the younger women. This result is reminiscent of Meyer, Russo, and Talbot's (1995) finding that older and younger women made similar decisions when presented with hypothetical treatments for breast cancer (e.g., lumpectomy, mastectomy), despite the fact that the older women requested less information and offered less complete rationales for their decisions. The results by Zwahr and colleagues (1999) and by Meyer and associates (1995) suggest that older adults may rely heavily on intact knowledge structures and automatic processes when making medical decisions, at least for relatively familiar medical conditions. A compatible view is that older adults may recognize limits on their information-processing capacity, even for a familiar medical topic, and thus seek out less new information on that topic (see, e.g., Brown & Park, 2002). It is possible that older adults may arrive at systematically poorer decisions when medical situations are less familiar or are more immediately life threatening than the scenarios studied by Zwahr and colleagues and by Meyer and associates. However, this view must be tempered by the fact that older adults often rely on decision-making proxies (e.g., physicians and family members), which may be somewhat adaptive, given their declining cognitive resources.

Older adults' greater gullibility and susceptibility to memory distortions such as the illusion of truth under conditions of cognitive load suggests that older adults may experience cognitive stress when learning about new medical products and services from physicians, salespeople, or the World Wide Web.

²⁶ Ybarra, O., Chan, E., & Park, D. C. (2001). Young and old adults' concerns about morality and competence. *Motivation & Emotion*, 25, 85–100.

Finally, it should be noted that the tendency of older adults to seek less information (explore fewer available options) before reaching a decision is not specific to medical decision making. The same has been shown for such diverse activities as choosing apartments or automobiles and for choosing chess moves . Thus, how older and younger adults make decisions differs, in part, due to age-related cognitive changes.²⁷

²⁷ Scott C. Brown and Denise C. Park, *Theoretical Models of Cognitive Aging and Implications for Translational Research in Medicine*.2003.P61.

4_ Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter One has provided a foundational understanding of the intricate relationship between age and presidential leadership through a historical and theoretical lens. The chapter began with an introduction to the topic, highlighting the significance of age in political discourse and leadership dynamics. The examination of presidential age-related data offered a quantitative backdrop, illustrating trends and patterns in the ages of U.S. presidents.

The case studies of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan presented qualitative insights into how age and cognitive health impacted their presidencies. These historical examples underscored the duality of aging, showcasing both the wisdom derived from extensive experience and the challenges posed by cognitive decline.

The theoretical framework further deepened this understanding by exploring theoretical models of aging and cognition, and their relevance to medical decision-making. These models provided a scientific basis for evaluating the cognitive capabilities of older leaders and highlighted the complexities involved in their decision-making processes.

Overall, this chapter has established a comprehensive context for analyzing the role of age in presidential leadership, setting the stage for subsequent chapters to delve into contemporary case studies and media analyses in the post-Trump era.

Chapter Two

The Trump Era and Its Aftermath, Biden and Beyond

1_ Overview of Donald Trump's presidency and his leadership

Donald Trump's term as the 45th president of the United States began on January 20, 2017, and concluded on January 20, 2021. Trump, a Republican from New York City, assumed office after winning the Electoral College against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, despite losing the popular vote to Clinton by a margin of nearly three million votes³⁰.

His inauguration marked the first time in American history that a president took office without prior public office or military experience. Throughout his campaign and presidency, Trump made an unprecedented number of false or misleading statements. He was defeated in the 2020 presidential election by former Democratic vice president Joe Biden, bringing an end to his presidency after serving a single term.

Trump's own staff, subordinates, and allies often described him as childish.³¹ He had a tendency to avoid reading detailed briefing documents, such as the President's Daily Brief, and preferred to receive oral briefings instead. Intelligence briefers would repeat his name and title to maintain his attention. Additionally, he relied heavily on watching television, particularly Fox News programs like Fox & Friends and Hannity, for information. He would sometimes repeat the talking points from these shows in his public statements and early morning tweets. Trump would become angry if intelligence analyses contradicted his beliefs or public statements, and there were instances where briefers were instructed not to provide him with conflicting information³².

Trump's management style was characterized by fostering chaos, resulting in low morale and policy confusion among his staff. He struggled to effectively compromise during

³⁰ Joung, Madeleine (July 12, 2019). "Trump Has Now Had More Cabinet Turnover Than Reagan, Obama and the Two Bushes". *Time*. Archived from the original on July 3, 2020.

³¹ Drezner, Daniel W. (2020). *The Toddler-in-Chief*. University of Chicago Press. doi:10.7208/chicago/9780226714394.001.0001. ISBN 978-0-226-71425-7. S2CID 202954099.

³² Gertz, Matthew (January 5, 2018). "I've Studied the Trump-Fox Feedback Loop for Months. It's Crazier Than You Think". *Politico*.

his time in the 115th U.S. Congress, leading to significant governmental gridlock and few notable legislative accomplishments despite Republican control of both houses³³. According to presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, Trump lacked several traits of an effective leader, including humility, acknowledging errors, empathy, resilience, collaboration, connecting with people, and controlling unproductive emotions³⁴.

In January 2018, it was reported that Trump's working hours typically started around 11:00 a.m. and ended around 6:00 p.m., with fewer meetings during his working hours to accommodate his desire for more unstructured free time, referred to as "executive time." In 2019, an analysis of Trump's schedule revealed that around sixty percent of the time between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. was designated as "executive time."³⁵

These details highlight how age may have played a factor in Trump's management style and work habits during his presidency.

³³ Landler, Mark; Haberman, Maggie (March 1, 2018). "Trump's Chaos Theory for the Oval Office Is Taking Its Toll". The New York Times.

³⁴ Stewart, James B. (January 10, 2019). "Why Trump's Unusual Leadership Style Isn't Working in the White House". The New York Times.

³⁵ Swan, Jonathan (January 7, 2018). "Trump's secret, shrinking schedule". Axios.

2_ Age-Related Issues and Media Coverage During and After Trump's Presidency

The portrayal of age-related issues in the media concerning former President Donald Trump has been a complex and multifaceted topic. Media coverage varied significantly, focusing on different aspects of Trump's age and health both during and after his presidency. This essay explores how these issues were depicted in the media and examines the implications of such portrayals.

2_1_ Media Focus During Trump's Presidency

During Trump's presidency, age-related discussions often centered on his physical and cognitive health. At 70 years old, Trump was the oldest person to assume the presidency until Joe Biden's inauguration in 2021. Media scrutiny was intense, with various outlets speculating about his fitness for office.

For instance, **The New York Times** frequently highlighted concerns about Trump's mental acuity and physical health, citing erratic behavior and an unconventional diet as potential red flags³⁶.

The media also paid close attention to Trump's annual physical examinations. Reports on these exams were widely covered, with mixed interpretations. For example, after his 2018 physical, **CNN** noted that while Trump's physician claimed he was in "excellent health," questions arose about his weight and cardiovascular health. This mixed messaging created a narrative that oscillated between reassurance and concern, reflecting broader societal anxieties about aging leaders.

³⁶ John Gramlich, Most Americans favor maximum age limits for federal elected officials, Supreme Court justices, Pew Research, October 4, 2023.

2_2_ Comparative Analysis with Other Leaders

Trump's age-related media coverage can be contrasted with that of Joe Biden, who faced similar scrutiny as the oldest president elected at the age of 78. Media outlets often compared the two, particularly focusing on cognitive tests and public speaking performances.

Politico reported on Trump's insistence on cognitive testing for Biden, framing it as a political strategy to question Biden's mental fitness while deflecting similar concerns about himself³⁷.

2_3_ Post-Presidency Portrayals

After leaving office, Trump's age-related coverage shifted slightly, focusing more on his post-presidency activities and potential 2024 run. Media speculation about his health persisted, particularly following incidents like his slow descent down a ramp at West Point and his unplanned visit to Walter Reed Medical Center during his term. The Washington Post explored these incidents in depth, often linking them to broader narratives about his fitness for future political endeavors .

2_4_ The Role of Ageism in Media Narratives

The portrayal of Trump's age in the media also touches on broader issues of ageism. Ageism, defined as discrimination based on age, often underpinned media narratives. Studies have shown that older individuals in high-stress positions, like the presidency, face disproportionate scrutiny compared to their younger counterparts.

For instance, **The Guardian** analyzed how age-related stereotypes influenced public perceptions of Trump and Biden, highlighting a societal tendency to equate age with diminished capability .

³⁷ Michael Dimock and John Gramlich, How America Changed During Donald Trump's Presidency, Pew Research , January 29, 2021

2_5_ Public Reactions and Political Implications

Public reactions to media portrayals of Trump's age varied. Supporters often dismissed concerns as politically motivated attacks, while critics used them to argue against his suitability for office. This polarization was evident in social media discourse and public opinion polls, which showed a divided electorate. **Pew Research Center** data indicated that while a segment of the population was concerned about Trump's age and health, another significant portion viewed these concerns as overstated or irrelevant³⁸.

The portrayal of age-related issues in the media during and after Trump's presidency reflects a complex interplay of political strategy, public perception, and ageism. Media narratives were shaped by broader societal attitudes towards aging, often highlighting the vulnerabilities associated with older age while also revealing deep-seated biases. As the U.S. continues to elect older leaders, the media's role in shaping perceptions of their age and health will remain a crucial aspect of political discourse.

3_ Trump's cognitive abilities.

The media's portrayal of former President Donald Trump's cognitive abilities has been a subject of intense scrutiny and debate.

The media's portrayal of former President Donald Trump's cognitive abilities has been a subject of intense scrutiny and debate. This essay explores how Trump's cognitive abilities were depicted in the media during and after his presidency, highlighting key events and narratives that shaped public perception.

³⁸ Michael D. and John G. | Mentioned | How America Changed During Donald Trump's Presidency.

3_1_ Cognitive Health During Trump's Presidency

From the onset of Trump's presidency, questions about his cognitive health were prominent in media coverage. At 70 years old when inaugurated, Trump's age naturally invited comparisons to previous older presidents and concerns about the mental demands of the office. The New York Times³⁹ often scrutinized Trump's behavior, speech patterns, and decision-making processes, suggesting that some of his actions might reflect cognitive decline or instability .

In particular, Trump's handling of high-stress situations and his public speeches were frequently analyzed for signs of cognitive impairment. For instance, during his 2017 speech in Jerusalem, where he appeared to slur his words, media outlets like CNN speculated about his cognitive health, although the White House attributed it to dry mouth ⁴⁰.

3_2_ Trump's Physical Examinations and Cognitive Testing

Trump's annual physical examinations were pivotal moments for media coverage. In 2018, after his physical, Trump's physician, Dr. Ronny Jackson, reported that Trump had performed "exceedingly well" on a cognitive test known as the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA), which screens for mild cognitive dysfunction ⁴¹. CNN and other media outlets discussed this extensively, some viewing it as reassurance of his mental fitness, while others remained skeptical and focused on the test's limitations and the need for continuous monitoring .

The MoCA test was created by Canadian neurologist Dr. Ziad Nasreddine. The test is 30 questions and designed to take 10 minutes. Questions include drawing a clock, copying a picture of a cube and identifying pictures of animals.

³⁹ President Trump, Melting Under Criticism, By The Editorial Board , June 30, 2017

⁴⁰ Jen Christensen, CNN, Did President Trump slur his speech? : December 7, 2017

⁴¹ Akshay Syal. Trump cognitive test: What is the Montreal Cognitive Assessment exam?, July 23, 2020.

"I created the test in 1996 as a screening examination where we ask the patient several questions," Nasreddine told NBC News. "Each question is accessing a different part of the brain in terms of cognition." It's a test only given by doctors and not meant for the general public. "It has to be interpreted by a physician who has expertise in cognitive disorders and cognition," Nasreddine said.

A score of greater than 26 is considered normal while 18-25 is considered mild cognitive impairment, 10-17 is considered moderate cognitive impairment. A score less than 10 is considered severe cognitive impairment.

Trump recently brought up his performance on the test as a challenge to Joe Biden, 77, the presumptive 2020 Democratic presidential nominee. On Wednesday, after a press briefing, Trump spoke to Fox News contributor Dr. Marc Siegel, during which he described the memory portion of the test.

Dr. Lawrence Honig, a neurologist and one of the directors of the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at Columbia University, said while the test is a pretty good indicator, it's not perfect. He has seen patients with dementia score greater than 26 and he has seen patients without dementia score below ³⁹.

This is because there are often confounding factors such as the level of education and whether the test is being given in the person's native language. A person with a high school education in the United States should be able to get 26 to 30, Honig said.

The media's reaction to Trump's cognitive test results was mixed. Some saw the high score as a reassurance of Trump's mental fitness, while others remained skeptical, questioning the test's limitations and emphasizing the need for continuous monitoring.

Dr. Lawrence Honig, a neurologist, pointed out that while the MoCA is a good indicator, it is not foolproof. Factors such as education level and test language can affect

scores, making it possible for individuals with dementia to score well and those without to score poorly.

Trump leveraged his performance on the MoCA as a challenge to Joe Biden, highlighting the role of cognitive health in political campaigns. However, the varied media interpretations and expert opinions underscored the complexity of using a single test to gauge cognitive ability comprehensively⁴².

This illustrated the broader challenges in assessing and communicating mental fitness in the context of presidential health, reflecting both the media's role in shaping public perception and the inherent uncertainties in cognitive testing.

4_ The Biden Presidency :

Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. (born November 20, 1942) is an American politician who is the 46th and current president of the United States since 2021⁴³. A member of the Democratic Party, he previously served as the 47th vice president from 2009 to 2017 under President Barack Obama and represented Delaware in the United States Senate from 1973 to 2009.

Biden was inaugurated as the 46th president of the United States on January 20, 2021. At 78, he is the oldest person to have assumed the office⁴⁴. He is the second Catholic president (after John F. Kennedy)⁴⁵ and the first president whose home state is Delaware. He is also the first man since George H. W. Bush to have been both vice president and president,

⁴² Akshay Syal. Trump cognitive test | Mentioned | 2020.

⁴³ Baker, Peter (January 20, 2021). "Biden Inaugurated as the 46th President Amid a Cascade of Crises". The New York Times. ISSN 0362-4331. Retrieved May 11, 2024.

⁴⁴ Zak, Dan (January 12, 2021). "Joe Biden, 78, will lead an American gerontocracy". Washington Post. ISSN 0190-8286. Retrieved May 11, 2024

⁴⁵ Sandstrom, Aleksandra (January 20, 2021). "Biden is only the second Catholic president, but nearly all have been Christians". Pew Research Center. Retrieved May 11, 2024.

and the second non-incumbent vice president (after Richard Nixon in 1968) to be elected president. He is also the first president from the Silent Generation ⁴⁶.

Joe Biden is the oldest sitting president in United States history.[665][666] During his presidency, Republicans, Democrats, and pundits raised questions about Biden's cognitive health in reaction to his publicized gaffes. Biden has repeatedly said that he is fit for the presidency ⁴⁷.

4_1_ Biden 's cognitive abilities.

The special counsel Robert K. Hur's report, in which he declined to prosecute President Biden for his handling of classified documents, also included a much-debated assessment of Mr. Biden's cognitive abilities.

"Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview with him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory."⁴⁸

As an expert on memory, **Charan Ranganath** can assure that everyone forgets. In fact, most of the details of our lives — the people we meet, the things we do and the places we go — will inevitably be reduced to memories that capture only a small fraction of those experiences.

It is normal to be more forgetful as you get older. Generally, memory functions begin to decline in our 30s and continue to fade into old age. However, age in and of itself doesn't indicate the presence of memory deficits that would affect an individual's ability to perform

⁴⁶ "At 78 and the oldest president, Biden sees a world changed". AP News. January 23, 2021. Retrieved May 11, 2024

⁴⁷ Siegel, Dr. Marc. "Should the nation be concerned about Biden's cognitive abilities?". The Hill.

⁴⁸ Charan Ranganath, I'm a Neuroscientist. We're Thinking About Biden's Memory and Age in the Wrong Way, The New York Times , Feb. 12, 2024

in a demanding leadership role. And an apparent memory lapse may or may not be consequential, depending on the reasons it occurred.

There is forgetting, and there is Forgetting. If you're over the age of 40, you've most likely experienced the frustration of trying to grasp that slippery word on the tip of your tongue. Colloquially, this might be described as forgetting, but most memory scientists would call this retrieval failure, meaning that the memory is there but we just can't pull it up when we need it. On the other hand, Forgetting (with a capital F) is when a memory is seemingly lost or gone altogether. Inattentively conflating the names of the leaders of two countries would fall in the first category, whereas being unable to remember that you had ever met the president of Egypt would fall into the second ⁴⁸.

Over the course of typical aging, we see changes in the functioning of the prefrontal cortex, a brain area that plays a starring role in many of our day-to-day memory successes and failures. These changes mean that as we get older, we tend to be more distractible and often struggle to pull up words or names we're looking for. Remembering events takes longer, and it requires more effort, and we can't catch errors as quickly as we used to. This translates to a lot more forgetting and a little more Forgetting.

Many of the special counsel's observations about Mr. Biden's memory seem to fall in the category of forgetting, meaning that they are more indicative of a problem with finding the right information from memory than Forgetting. Calling up the date that an event occurred, like the last year of Mr. Biden's vice presidency or the year of his son's death, is a complex measure of memory. Remembering that an event took place is different from being able to put a date on when it happened, which is more challenging with increased age. The president very likely has many memories, even though he could not immediately pull up dates in the stressful (and more immediately pressing) context of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Other “memory” issues highlighted in the media are not so much cases of forgetting as they are of difficulties in the articulation of facts and knowledge. For instance, in July 2023, Mr. Biden mistakenly stated in a speech that “we have over 100 people dead,” when he should have said, “over one million.” He has struggled with a stutter since childhood, and research suggests that managing a stutter demands prefrontal resources that would normally enable people to find the right word or at least quickly correct errors after the fact ⁴⁹.

Americans are understandably concerned about the advanced age of the two top contenders in the coming presidential election (Mr. Biden is 81, and Donald Trump is 77), although some of these concerns are rooted in cultural stereotypes and fears around aging. The fact is that there is a huge degree of variability in cognitive aging. Age is, on average, associated with decreased memory, but studies that follow up the same person over several years have shown that although some older adults show precipitous declines over time, other super-agers remain as sharp as ever ⁴⁹.

In February 8, 2024, The Washington Times shared an article written by Jeff Mordock, *‘President Biden raised more questions this week about his cognitive abilities after a series of jarring public appearances in which he twice claimed to have had recent conversations with long-dead world leaders.’*

His frequent mental miscues also sparked widespread voter concern as he seeks a second term in the White House. If Mr. Biden is reelected, he will be 86 at the end of his second term.

President Joe Biden’s cognitive ability regularly makes headlines as the US eyes up a presidential contest between the two of its oldest-ever candidates. With Donald Trump

⁴⁹ Charan Ranganath | Mentioned | The New York Times, Feb. 12, 2024

dominating the Republican primaries and making Biden's faux pas fodder for his dedicated base, all eyes were on Biden's annual medical check-up ⁵⁰.

5_ Comparative Analysis:

Comparison of public and media treatment of Biden versus Trump in terms of age-related concerns.

The public and media treatment of age-related concerns for Joe Biden and Donald Trump offers a revealing look into how ageism and health scrutiny play out in political arenas. Both presidents, assuming office as septuagenarians (+70 years old) , faced intense media coverage and public discourse about their age and cognitive abilities. However, the nature and focus of these concerns differed significantly for each, influenced by their respective political contexts, personalities, and media strategies.

Starting by Biden, **Fox News** published an article intitled 'It's time for a competency test for politicians' written by **Amb. Nikki Haley**, that said ⁵¹:

'...Joe Biden announced his bid for re-election last week. If he wins next November, he will be 82 years old when he takes the oath of office, and 86 at the end of a second term. That would surpass the oldest president in American history by nine years.'

'That's not a problem in itself, but millions of Americans watch President Biden and believe he exhibits cognitive decline. He rarely takes press questions. He spends most weekends at his vacation home in Delaware. Sadly, he often seems disoriented and confused. Yet the public can't know for sure without a cognitive test, which Biden has either not taken or declines to publish as part of his medical records.'

⁵⁰ The New Zealand Herald , Concern over Joe Biden's cognitive ability ahead of annual physical exam, 29 Feb, 2024

⁵¹ Fox News , Amb. Nikki Haley , 'It's time for a competency test for politicians' , Published May 1, 2023

Fox News, through the article by Amb. Nikki Haley, has emphasized the need for cognitive testing, citing Biden's age and perceived cognitive decline. Haley's argument that Biden "rarely takes press questions" and "often seems disoriented and confused" reflects a common media tactic: framing age-related behaviors as problematic without concrete evidence of cognitive impairment. This stance can be seen as politically motivated, aiming to cast doubt on Biden's ability to govern effectively.

In an article **published in Forbes**, Feb 29, 2024, written by **Sara Dorn** ‘...Concerns about Biden’s age have been exacerbated by verbal and physical stumbles throughout his tenure, along with a recent Justice Department report that suggested Biden had a poor memory. The report, by Justice Department Special Counsel Robert Hur, explained the DOJ would not pursue further action against Biden for his handling of classified documents after leaving office, in part because a jury would likely sympathize with Biden as a “well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.” Biden, in recent months, has sought to reframe the narrative by highlighting his decades of experience, making jokes about his age and taking jabs at Trump’s own rhetorical gaffes.’⁵²

Sara Dorn's article in Forbes highlights verbal and physical stumbles, reinforcing concerns about Biden's cognitive health. The mention of a Justice Department report suggesting Biden's poor memory as a factor in not pursuing legal action further cements the narrative of cognitive decline. Such coverage can influence public perception, making it imperative for Biden to counter these claims by emphasizing his experience and making light-hearted remarks about his age, as noted in the article.

⁵² Sara Dorn ,The Forbes, Here’s Why Mandatory Cognitive Exams For Presidents Are Unlikely—As Trump Demands Biden Undergo Test , Feb 29, 2024

Shiv Sudhakar March 4, 2024, a writer in politics with the **NBC New York**, ‘*Biden medically cleared without dementia screening: When does memory loss merit cognitive testing?*’

‘...President Joe Biden was declared fit for duty by his physician after his annual physical on Feb. 28, the same month a special counsel report raised concerns about his memory. However, the 81-year-old did not undergo a cognitive exam because both his primary care doctor and neurologist said it wasn't necessary, according to White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.⁵³’

Neurologists told NBC News the memory issues the president has displayed recently — namely forgetting dates and mixing up names — do not indicate Biden has dementia and instead could just be a normal part of aging.

Still, Biden's age and fitness for the presidency are top of mind for many voters heading into the 2024 election. A Feb. 6 national NBC poll found three-quarters of respondents, including half of Democrats, have concerns about his mental and physical health.

Less than half of respondents felt the same way about Republican frontrunner former President Donald Trump, who's also had memory issues, recently mixing up fellow presidential candidate and former Gov. Nikki Haley and former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. Trump has also confused Biden and former President Barack Obama at least seven times, Forbes reported.

⁵³ Shiv Sudhakar , NBC New York, Biden medically cleared without dementia screening: When does memory loss merit cognitive testing?’ March 4, 2024.

From a personal and objective point of view, it can be said that:

- The media portrayal and public discourse surrounding President Joe Biden's cognitive health reflect a complex interplay of political strategy, media bias, and societal attitudes towards aging. The examination of these narratives offers valuable insights into how age-related concerns are leveraged in political contexts.
- The media's focus on Biden's age and cognitive health highlights underlying ageism. The tendency to equate age with cognitive decline can perpetuate stereotypes that older individuals are less capable of holding high-stress positions. This bias can overshadow the actual capabilities and experience that an older leader like Biden brings to the office.
- The emphasis on cognitive testing and frequent reminders of Biden's age can be seen as strategic moves by political opponents to undermine his credibility. By framing Biden's age as a liability, opponents aim to shift public opinion and create doubt about his fitness for a second term.
- The contrasting narratives—from sympathetic portrayals to calls for cognitive testing—impact public trust in Biden's leadership. While empathetic portrayals can build a connection with voters, persistent doubts about cognitive health can erode confidence in his ability to make sound decisions. This dynamic necessitates a balanced approach in media coverage, combining respect for age with factual reporting on health and performance.

President Joe Biden's leadership, when viewed through the lens of cognitive health concerns, presents a complex picture. His extensive experience and empathetic persona are significant strengths, contributing positively to his ability to lead. However, the ongoing scrutiny of his cognitive abilities, fueled by both genuine concerns and political motivations, necessitates a transparent and proactive approach to health disclosures.

Ultimately, Biden's ability to lead effectively should be judged on a combination of his past performance, current capabilities, and the results of regular medical evaluations. While age-related cognitive changes are natural, they do not inherently diminish a leader's capacity to govern. Clear communication and transparency about his health are key to maintaining public trust and ensuring informed evaluations of his leadership.

Now talking about Trump,

David Folkenflik, Media Correspondent at **NPR News** said

The conversation between **Tamara Keith** and **David Folkenflik** highlights a nuanced landscape where age-related concerns are more pronounced for Biden than for Trump, influenced by partisan perceptions and media coverage. While both men face scrutiny regarding their cognitive health, Biden's current role as president and the constant visibility of his actions subject him to more rigorous examination. The way each candidate addresses these concerns—Biden with humor and a focus on his accomplishments, and Trump with boasts about his cognitive tests—reflects their differing strategies in managing public perception. Ultimately, the discourse around age and cognitive fitness will likely continue to be a significant element in the 2024 presidential election narrative.

'Trump has had his own moments of physical awkwardness and verbose, often disjointed speeches, but these have not significantly shifted public perception about his mental fitness'⁵⁴.

'Trump emphasizes his cognitive test results and frequently boasts about his health, presenting himself as mentally sharp'.

⁵⁴ David Folkenflik, NPR News, 'Is there a double standard on age between Trump and Biden?', February 13, 2024

Trump's leadership style and mental acuity have been subjects of intense debate. Despite occasional physical awkwardness and disjointed speeches, Trump's cognitive health has not significantly shifted public perception of his mental fitness. His frequent boasts about acing cognitive tests and public demonstrations of his health are strategies to counteract concerns and reassure his supporters of his mental sharpness .

The Wall Street Journal published in Feb. 20, 2024, a study that discusses whether mental capacity or memory problems are going to be a problem for either candidate.

*'Both Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden have exceeded the average U.S. life expectancy. Although they have access to top healthcare resources, both work in high-stress environments. While most of the questions surrounding presidential age have focused on mental cognition, my concern lies in a different direction: Does either candidate have a plan for what happens if he dies in office?'*⁵⁵.

The Wall Street Journal study and comments from experts like Meghan Kenney at St. John's University further contextualize this issue. Kenney suggests that while Biden's cognitive decline is more noticeable, Trump at 77 still appears more vigorous. This comparison underscores the importance of mental capacity and physical health in the upcoming election, as both candidates' abilities to effectively lead are crucial considerations for voters .

Meghan Kenney, - St. John's University - said *'Donald Trump at 77 isn't hindered as Mr. Biden is at 81. While Mr. Biden's mental capacity is declining, that doesn't imply that Mr. Trump's will. As the November election approaches, the candidates' health and cognitive abilities should be considered by voters. Ignoring their age would be a mistake, since it would significantly affect the future of the U.S. The presidency requires someone who can*

⁵⁵ The Wall Street Journal , Trump, Biden and Old Age ,Feb. 20, 2024

effectively and confidently lead the country, which is why electorates won't look past mental capacity when choosing a candidate.'

Alzheimer's Society Website in The UK, published recently an article '**Donald Trump, Joe Biden and dementia: Why not to diagnose from a distance**', 22 February 2024, that said,

'In recent years, there has been a lot of speculation that Donald Trump and Joe Biden may have dementia or some form of mental health condition. However, this kind of speculation is usually wrong, is unethical and stigmatizes people living with dementia and mental health conditions.'

'... Donald Trump even took a dementia screening test to prove that he didn't have dementia. President Biden's office has recently had to defend him not taking a cognitive test during his routine physical exam⁵⁶.'

The Alzheimer's Society in the UK cautions against diagnosing dementia or other mental health conditions, emphasizing the ethical implications and potential stigma associated with such speculation. This perspective highlights the need for objective and medically grounded evaluations rather than politically motivated conjecture.

Questions about the mental capacities of Trump have been an issue in the campaign. And until recently, most of them have been directed at the incumbent president.

Susan Milligan, Senior Politics Writer in **US News**, wrote in Jan. 26, 2024: '*Nikki Haley, Trump's GOP primary foe, the target of his recent wrath, and the woman Trump appeared to confuse with former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi when Trump was assigning blame for security at the Capitol during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. Not coincidentally, Haley is 52 – and immune from suggestions that she is too old for the job. Haley, once cautious in her*

⁵⁶ Alzheimer's Society Website, Donald Trump, Joe Biden and dementia: Why not to diagnose from a distance', 22 February 2024

*criticism of her party's presidential front-runner, has noted several of Trump's glaring misstatements of late and suggested that he take a test to show he's fit to serve*⁵⁷.

"...The reason Trump's age has generally not been an issue is [because of] the energy around his supporters and the energy directed at him from his supporters. His rallies always seem loud and vibrant. So the age thing doesn't really resonate, as opposed to someone who is really focused on policy,"

Susan Milligan's observations in US News suggest that Trump's age-related concerns are mitigated by the energy and enthusiasm of his supporters. His rallies are characterized by high energy, which contrasts with the more policy-focused and less dynamic image often attributed to Biden. This vibrancy at public events helps deflect concerns about Trump's age and mental acuity, presenting him as a vigorous leader despite his age .

Trump's own narrative often used age as a political tool, particularly against Joe Biden. He frequently questioned Biden's cognitive abilities and mental fitness, urging for cognitive tests and portraying Biden as unfit due to his age. Politico covered these instances extensively, noting how Trump used such tactics to deflect similar concerns about himself and to cast doubt on Biden's capabilities .

From a personal and objective point of view, it can be said that:

Trump's leadership style and mental acuity have been subjects of intense debate. Despite occasional physical awkwardness and disjointed speeches, Trump's cognitive health has not significantly shifted public perception of his mental fitness.

⁵⁷ Susan Milligan , US News , Questions about the mental capacities of both Biden and Trump have been an issue in the campaign. And until recently, most of them have been directed at the incumbent president, Jan. 26, 2024

His frequent boasts about acing cognitive tests and public demonstrations of his health are strategies to counteract concerns and reassure his supporters of his mental sharpness .

Overall, the analysis of Donald Trump's leadership and mental situation related to age reveals a complex interplay of public perception, media portrayal, and partisan bias. While concerns about age and cognitive health are pertinent for both Trump and Biden, the different contexts in which these concerns are raised and addressed significantly influence their impact.

Trump's proactive approach to showcasing his mental sharpness and the energetic support from his base contribute to a perception of vitality that mitigates some age-related concerns. However, the ethical considerations in diagnosing cognitive decline and the importance of objective health assessments remain crucial in evaluating the suitability of any candidate for the presidency.

6_ Implications for future presidential candidates :

The scrutiny of President Joe Biden's cognitive health and age, juxtaposed with the public perception of Donald Trump's mental acuity, underscores the multifaceted role these factors play in political discourse. Here we present the implications for future presidential candidates, various perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding.

- The media portrayal of presidential candidates' cognitive health is deeply intertwined with political strategy and media bias. In Biden's case, media focus on his age and cognitive health often reflects underlying ageism, perpetuating stereotypes that older individuals are less capable of handling high-stress positions . Such narratives are frequently employed by political opponents to undermine a candidate's credibility. For future candidates, this indicates a need for robust media strategies that address age-related biases while highlighting the candidate's experience and capabilities.

- Public trust in a candidate's leadership is significantly influenced by media narratives and the candidate's approach to health disclosures. Biden's empathetic persona and extensive experience are substantial assets, yet the persistent emphasis on his cognitive health can erode public confidence . This dynamic underscores the importance of transparent communication regarding health. Future candidates will need to balance openness about their health with a focus on their qualifications and achievements to maintain public trust.
- The tendency to equate age with cognitive decline in media narratives highlights societal ageism, which can overshadow the actual capabilities of older leaders . For future candidates, combating ageism will involve not only personal transparency about health but also broader efforts to educate the public on the value of experience and the non-linear nature of aging.
- Both Biden and Trump have approached concerns about cognitive health differently. Trump's proactive stance in showcasing his cognitive sharpness through frequent boasts about cognitive tests and public demonstrations contrasts with the more defensive position often seen with Biden . This indicates that future candidates may benefit from adopting a proactive approach to health disclosures, using them as opportunities to demonstrate vitality and mental acuity, rather than merely responding to criticisms.
- The ethical implications of diagnosing cognitive decline in public figures are profound. The debate over cognitive health highlights the necessity of objective health assessments for candidates. Future presidential hopefuls should advocate for

and participate in regular, transparent medical evaluations to ensure that their fitness for office is assessed fairly and accurately .

- Media outlets have a responsibility to balance respect for age with factual reporting on health and performance. For future candidates, ensuring that media coverage is fair and balanced will be crucial. This involves working with the media to provide accurate information and counteract biased narratives that may skew public perception .

The examination of President Joe Biden's and Donald Trump's cognitive health narratives reveals a complex interplay of political strategy, media bias, and societal attitudes towards aging. For future presidential candidates, the implications are clear: they must navigate age-related biases, proactively manage health disclosures, and foster transparent communication to maintain public trust. Addressing these challenges head-on will be crucial for ensuring that candidates are evaluated based on their true capabilities and experience, rather than age-related stereotypes.

7_ Conclusion

Chapter Two has provided a detailed analysis of how age and cognitive health have influenced the leadership, media representation, and public perception of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. This chapter began with an overview of Donald Trump's presidency, highlighting his leadership style and the significant media focus on his cognitive abilities. The media narratives often scrutinized Trump's age, comparing his cognitive health and leadership to other global leaders, and these portrayals continued to shape his post-presidency image.

The role of ageism in media narratives was critically examined, revealing how age-related biases influenced public reactions and political implications during and after Trump's presidency. Detailed sections on Trump's cognitive health, including his physical examinations and cognitive testing, provided insights into the public and political discourse surrounding his capabilities.

The chapter then transitioned to an analysis of Joe Biden's presidency, with a particular focus on his cognitive abilities and how they have been perceived and reported by the media. A comparative analysis between Trump and Biden highlighted the similarities and differences in how age and cognitive health issues have been addressed for each leader.

Finally, the chapter discussed the broader implications for future presidential candidates, emphasizing the ongoing importance of age and cognitive health in political leadership. This sets the stage for further exploration in subsequent chapters, particularly in understanding how these factors will continue to shape presidential politics and public expectations in the future.

General Conclusion

The examination of age-related issues in presidential leadership, as discussed in the preceding chapters, offers a comprehensive understanding of how age, cognition, and media portrayal intersect in the realm of political leadership. Through historical context, theoretical frameworks, and case studies, we have explored the multifaceted nature of aging in presidential candidates and its implications for governance and public perception.

In Chapter One, we laid the foundation by exploring the historical context of presidential age-related data and analyzing the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan. These case studies highlighted that age and health have long been pertinent issues in presidential history. We observed how these leaders navigated their roles despite health challenges and how their age impacted their decision-making processes and public perception.

The theoretical framework provided insights into models of aging and cognition, emphasizing that aging is a complex, multifaceted process that affects individuals differently. Theoretical models elucidated how cognitive abilities can be maintained or decline with age, and how medical decision-making becomes increasingly crucial for older individuals in leadership positions. This foundation is essential for understanding the contemporary discussions about presidential age and cognitive health.

Chapter Two delved into the specifics of the Trump and Biden presidencies, offering a detailed analysis of media coverage, public reactions, and the political implications of their age and cognitive health. During Trump's presidency, media focus and public discourse often scrutinized his cognitive abilities, albeit with a different lens compared to Biden. Trump's cognitive health, physical examinations, and self-reported cognitive test results were central to the narrative of his mental fitness for office.

The Biden presidency has been marked by heightened scrutiny of his age and cognitive abilities. Media portrayals and public concerns have significantly influenced the perception of Biden's capability to lead. Comparative analysis revealed a dichotomy in how age-related concerns are framed for Biden and Trump, underscoring the role of media bias and partisanship in shaping public opinion.

The exploration of implications for future presidential candidates who are of advanced age is particularly salient. As the population ages and life expectancy increases, it is likely that more candidates will be of advanced age. This necessitates a balanced approach to

assessing their fitness for office, incorporating regular cognitive and physical health assessments while avoiding ageism and ensuring ethical considerations.

Future policies may include mandatory cognitive and physical assessments, clearer succession planning protocols, and enhanced public education on age-related health issues. These measures would aim to maintain the integrity of the presidential office while respecting the dignity and capabilities of older candidates.

In conclusion, the interplay of age, cognitive health, and media portrayal in presidential leadership is a complex and evolving issue. Historical precedents, theoretical models, and contemporary case studies of Trump and Biden provide a rich tapestry of insights into how age-related concerns impact presidential governance. Moving forward, it is imperative to develop thoughtful, ethical, and transparent approaches to evaluating the fitness of presidential candidates, ensuring that leadership in the highest office is both competent and respected, regardless of age.

Annex

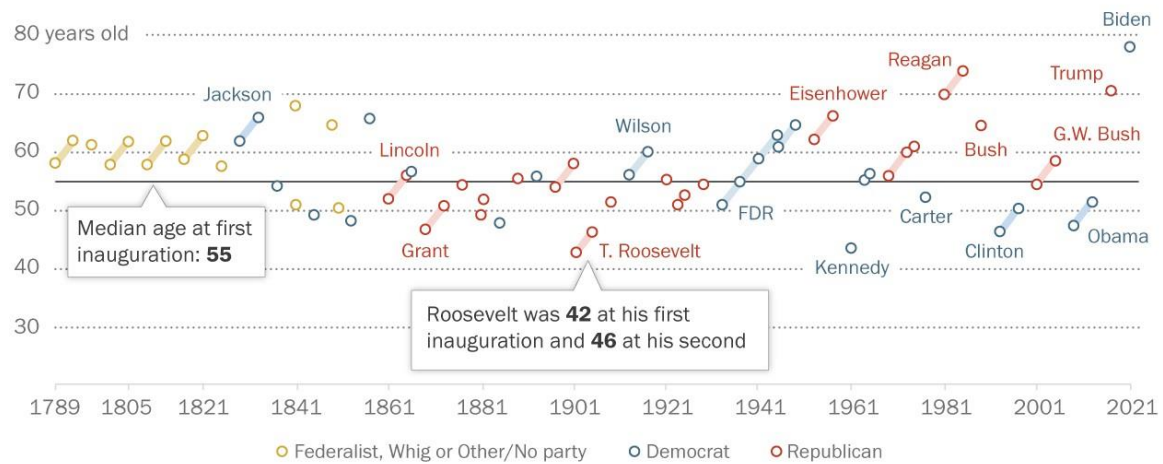
Table . I.1. Represents Presidential Age-related Data

President	Age at start of presidency	Age at end of presidency	Lifespan	
			Died	Age
George Washington	57 years, 67 days Apr 30, 1789	65 years, 10 days Mar 4, 1797	Dec 14, 1799	67 years, 295 days
John Adams	61 years, 125 days Mar 4, 1797	65 years, 125 days Mar 4, 1801	Jul 4, 1826	90 years, 247 days
Thomas Jefferson	57 years, 325 days Mar 4, 1801	65 years, 325 days Mar 4, 1809	Jul 4, 1826	83 years, 82 days
James Madison	57 years, 353 days Mar 4, 1809	65 years, 353 days Mar 4, 1817	Jun 28, 1836	85 years, 104 days
Abraham Lincoln	52 years, 20 days Mar 4, 1861	56 years, 62 days Apr 15, 1865	Apr 15, 1865	56 years, 62 days
Woodrow Wilson	56 years, 66 days Mar 4, 1913	64 years, 66 days Mar 4, 1921	Feb 3, 1924	67 years, 37 days
Franklin D. Roosevelt	51 years, 33 days Mar 4, 1933	63 years, 72 days Apr 12, 1945	Apr 12, 1945	63 years, 72 days
Harry S. Truman	60 years, 339 days Apr 12, 1945	68 years, 257 days Jan 20, 1953	Dec 26, 1972	88 years, 232 days
Dwight D. Eisenhower	62 years, 98 days Jan 20, 1953	70 years, 98 days Jan 20, 1961	Mar 28, 1969	78 years, 165 days
John F. Kennedy	43 years, 236 days Jan 20, 1961	46 years, 177 days Nov 22, 1963	Nov 22, 1963	46 years, 177 days
Richard Nixon	56 years, 11 days Jan 20, 1969	61 years, 212 days Aug 9, 1974 ^[e]	Apr 22, 1994	81 years, 103 days
Gerald Ford	61 years, 26 days Aug 9, 1974	63 years, 190 days Jan 20, 1977	Dec 26, 2006	93 years, 165 days
Jimmy Carter	52 years, 111 days Jan 20, 1977	56 years, 111 days Jan 20, 1981	–	99 years, 247 days
Ronald Reagan	69 years, 349 days Jan 20, 1981	77 years, 349 days Jan 20, 1989	Jun 5, 2004	93 years, 120 days
George H. W. Bush	64 years, 222 days Jan 20, 1989	68 years, 222 days Jan 20, 1993	Nov 30, 2018	94 years, 171 days

President	Age at start of presidency	Age at end of presidency	Lifespan	
			Died	Age
Bill Clinton	46 years, 154 days Jan 20, 1993	54 years, 154 days Jan 20, 2001	–	77 years, 290 days
George W. Bush	54 years, 198 days Jan 20, 2001	62 years, 198 days Jan 20, 2009	–	77 years, 334 days
Barack Obama	47 years, 169 days Jan 20, 2009	55 years, 169 days Jan 20, 2017	–	62 years, 305 days
Donald Trump	70 years, 220 days Jan 20, 2017	74 years, 220 days Jan 20, 2021	–	77 years, 356 days
Joe Biden	78 years, 61 days Jan 20, 2021	–	–	81 years, 197 days

The median age for presidents at first inauguration is 55 years old

Ages of U.S. presidents at inauguration, 1789-2021



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of historical information from the Library of Congress, the White House Historical Association, the University of Virginia Miller Center and Encyclopedia Britannica.

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Fig. I.1. The median age for presidents at first inauguration is 55 years old.

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