**Ethics and politics**

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Last August, the FBI raided former US president Donald Trump's resort home in Florida. They searched for and confiscated a large number of classified documents that were in the former president's possession and that he had refused to turn over to the National Archives as required.

This was followed by the expected reactions from both political parties – Republicans condemning the unprecedented raid on a former president’s home and Democrats criticizing the former president's refusal to turn over the documents.

And now it has been revealed that lawyers have found classified documents marked “top secret” in offices used by Joe Biden while serving as vice president, as well as at his home. As expected, the political brouhaha has hit very high decibels. Both matters – Trump and Biden's possession of classified documents – are under investigation by the Department of Justice. Biden claims to not have any knowledge of such documents in his former office, while Trump had asserted his authority to keep whatever he wanted. “I could declassify whatever documents I wished”, therefore everything I had was declassified, he has asserted. As for Biden, at a minimum this represents careless handling of sensitive material.

The Department of Justice having to investigate two presidents is quite unprecedented. It appears that in recent years adherence to laws or ethical norms has become a disappearing commodity in US politics, as it has been in so many other countries.

Shortly after the conclusion of midterm elections last November, the country found out that George Santos, newly elected Republican Representative to the US Congress from New York, had lied about just every important aspect of his background. His education, work experience, his faith, and what his family has endured over generations were all fabricated. How he managed to lend $700,000 to his campaign is under investigation for possible campaign finance violation.

Yet, the fact that the newly elected representative has fabricated his entire life story isn't the most shocking part of the story. What is truly shocking is that Santos’ Republican Party led by the newly elected Speaker doesn't feel Mr Santos should have to resign. The Republican majority in the House of just four seats must be protected at all costs.

The last several years in American politics have shown that the super wealthy and super powerful may just be above the law, and, that adherence to laws and norms of behavior are somewhat voluntary. In many cases there are simply no means of enforcing compliance.

This week Donald Trump's real-estate organization was fined $1.6 million for tax fraud, the largest fine allowed by New York State law. Donald Trump has not been personally implicated, but his chief financial officer has received a five-month prison sentence. Trump has brushed off the entire episode by simply calling it “politically motivated”.

While these are clear acts of unethical behaviour, there are other examples of violation of laws and even the American constitution that have been allowed to slide. In 2016, then leader of the Republican majority in the Senate Mitch McConnell decided he would not allow then president Obama to fill a seat in the US Supreme Court that had become vacant. When Obama nominated a candidate to fill the seat, as stipulated by the Constitution, the Senate leader simply ignored it, leaving the Supreme Court one seat short for almost a year. Leader McConnell cited his constitutional right to not give the presidential nominee a hearing.

Article II, Section 2 of the US constitution states that the president shall appoint justices to the Supreme Court “with advice and consent of the Senate.” Whether such “advice and consent” could include the right to simply refuse to consider a duly nominated justice is for legal scholars to argue.

Last but not least, the former president tried to overturn the results of the 2020 election by coming up with a twisted theory of election fraud. He wrongly asserted the vice president had powers to refuse to certify the results. Even his instigation of a riot that resulted in several deaths and the sacking of Capitol Hill in January 2021 has so far not resulted in any consequences for him.

In the face of legalization of unlimited funding of political campaigns and the unwillingness of the political system to hold transgressors responsible, how exactly the country will get back to being one of law and order remains to be seen.

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