**[Back to normalcy](https://www.dawn.com/news/1605402/back-to-normalcy)**

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MANY Americans are breathing giddy sighs of relief that Donald Trump at last has had all his dangerous presidential toys taken away, especially the nuclear launch codes. The US is in safe hands. President Joe Biden vows to restore a deeply divided and rattled nation to what he curiously chose to call “normalcy”.

After four nerve-wracking years of Trump, ‘normalcy’ sounds intensely appealing, especially to 44 per cent of those affluent Americans who tell pollsters they have been quite comfortable throughout the Covid pandemic, and whose votes largely decide elections. The higher your income in the US the more likely you are to vote. The other 56pc ordinarily do not count for much to either party, except as dupes to be appealed to with ‘hot button’ issues such as abortion, immigration and guns for Republicans, and Russiagate hysteria for Democrats.

The term ‘normalcy’ originated in 1920 as Republican Warren G. Harding’s presidential campaign slogan when he pledged to return the US to its pre-World War I and pre-Spanish Flu Arcadian splendour, a splendour that never existed except for the very privileged few. Harding heralded the message that “America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality….”

Normalcy for the tight-fisted Harding also meant a rejection of government activism on behalf of ordinary people. One must trust that Biden and his acolytes do not intend likewise, lest they play straight into the hands of Republicans angling to recapture control of Congress.

What could this stale term ‘normalcy’ mean today?

What could this stale term normalcy mean today? What is normal? Well, if we go by modern standards, it must mean that only the top 20pc of Americans will enjoy increases in wealth. That pattern was normalised long before Trump hit the political hustings. Bailed-out big banks and brokerages will revel in their highest profits ever, as they did last year. That troubling trend is unlikely to end because it too preceded Trump. Naturally, the widening gap between the superrich and everyone else won’t change because that blueprint has been embedded since the 1970s. It’s perfectly normal for wealth to flow uphill, so while no Democrat is exactly celebrating it they prefer not to pay attention so as not to alarm party donors. Normalcy surely means that the Pentagon defence budget will burgeon. Normalcy also signifies that the hard-fought gain of a Democratic Party majority, and the reform agenda it promotes, will be thrown away in a futile chase for bipartisanship with implacable Republicans, as was made clear during Obama’s wasted first two years.

Normalcy in foreign policy means that the US is likely to conjure up a pretext to extend combat operations abroad. Normalcy also means that the US remains a country where police are three times more likely to unleash tear gas, pepper spray and truncheons against left-wing protests than against right-wing ones, as reported in a study last month picked up by the Guardian. Normalcy, by these measures, isn’t much reason for jubilation.

Yet the Biden administration’s moves so far are sprinkled with progressive measures that reflect the Bernie Sanders wing of the party, promising to pass a $2 trillion Covid relief package and public investment programme, raise the minimum wage, halt the Keystone pipeline through Native American lands, stock most financial posts with genuine watchdogs, appoint a serious diplomat to revive the Iran nuclear treaty, and reverse the worst of Trump’s executive orders.

Where does the loot come from to foot the bill for recovery? Well, as others point out, in excess of a trillion dollars accrued to billionaires last year and that would be a splendid place to impose new taxes. A financial transaction tax also would tamp down Wall Street imbroglios. Another proposition making the rounds is to redirect 10pc of the military budget into health, housing, education and infrastructure.

Biden reportedly has been swaying tow­ards the trap of slimming the stimulus package to win unnecessary Republican votes. This is no time for flinching. If Biden picks the ‘normal’ austerity route, the Rep­u­blicans can sabotage the stimulus while at the same time pose as consummate humanitarians by offering a paltry package instead. With a prolonged recession thereby guaranteed, the Democrats lose at least the Senate in 2022.

The supreme lesson to draw from dusty history books about normalcy is that it ended with the thunderclap of the 1929 crash and a decade-long Great Depression, which was lifted ultimately by another World War. One hopes Biden chooses his future words more carefully.

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*Published in Dawn, February 4th, 2021*