**America`s trajectory**

BY OW E N B E N N E T T-J O N E S 2022-01-04

THE ushering in of the new year is a time not only for resolutions but also, in the case of journalists, for predictions. So here is a forecast of what`s going to happen in the United States, not only in 2022 but looking as far ahead as early 2025.

This scenario begins with the 2022 midterms in which the Republicans will take back control of Congress. The recent Republican victory in the race for governor of Virginia show that the visibly aging Joe Biden has next to no prospect of bucking the well-established trend that the mid-terms go against the White House.

Once in control of Congress, the Republicans will inevitably resort to their hyper-partisan tactics, further frustrating any proposal, initiative or policy with Biden`s name on it and setting the scene for a rancorous presidential election campaign in 2024. Whether Biden has the energy to run for a second time is not yet clear. But we do know that Trump has a total grip on the Republican Party and although he has not declared his intention to run, he will do so and the Republicans will make him their candidate.

Making a prediction about the result of that election is inevitably speculative but past results give an indication of what might happen. In the popular vote in 2016, Trump lost to Hillary Clinton by 2.9 million votes only securing the presidency because of the electoral college system whereby states in most cases on a `winner takes all` basis send delegates to Washington to vote for the new president.

In 2020, Trump lost to Biden by 7m votes.

Trump is such a divisive figure there is little prospect of him breaking out from his loyal support base. In other words, there is every chance that when it comes to the popular vote in 2024 he will lose again and possibly by a very significant margin.

When he lost to Biden, Trump tried to overturn the result. We all heard the phone calls to, for example, the Georgia secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, in which Trump repeatedly demanded that the results be manipulated in his favour.

These efforts failed only because statelevel officials who control US elections such as Raffensperger refused to be bullied. That is unlikely to happen again in 2024. Many of those who resisted Trump last time round have come under severe pressure. Raffensperger, for example, has received a series of death threats describing how he and his family will die. Similar threats have been made to election officials all over the country. Police for reasons that are unclear have failed to investigate, never mind prosecute, the socalled patriots making the threats.As a result, many of the officials who held the line in 2020 have withdrawn from public life are being replaced by Trump ultra-loyalists who have swallowed their leader`s evidence-free claims that the 2020 election was rigged. Raffensperger has in fact refused to resign but, as a result, faces a challenge for his secretary of state slot (which comes up for election in 2022) from a Republican Congressman Jody Hice who is leaving his seat in Congress in an attempt to take over from Raffensperger. That Hice would relinquish his Congressional seat to be Georgia`s secretary of state is a mark of just how far Trump loyalists are going to get themselves into key positions in the electoral system. Some Republican states are also reforming their procedures to empower potentially partisan official oversight boards.

These new ideological state-level officials can be expected to refuse to validate Democrat wins in 2024. This in turn opens up the likelihood that Republican-heldstate assemblies will refuse to send duly elected pro-Democrat delegates to the electoral college to formally choose the president. Remember, it was at the Congressional meeting tovalidate those delegates` votes on Jan 6, 2021, that Trump tried to have a mob occupy the building to prevent that validation from taking place.

So, what happens if the election result isn`t respected? The endless manufactured grievances churned out by Fox News and the other right-wing US channels have given the Republicans the false impression that they are angrier than anyone else. But if the popular vote of the US electorate is overturned, then the Democrats and their supporters may well be even angrier. And needless to say, very many people in the United States Democrats as well as Republicans are armed.

So here is my prediction. In late 2024 or early 2025, there will be armed civil conflict in the US between the supporters of Trump on the one side and supporters of democracy on the other. And for once Pakistanis will be able to look at the US and shake their heads about a failed state.  The writeris author of The Bhutto Dynasty: The Struggle for Power in Pakistan.