[**Revenge of the Trumpists**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1719083/revenge-of-the-trumpists)

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The writer’s books of fiction, poetry, and criticism include Karachi Raj: A Novel and the recently finished novel The Incident of the Missing Kanchani.

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TRUMP-endorsed candidates at all levels of government are likely to score convincing victories in the upcoming US midterm elections on Nov 8. Thou­­gh their prospects were seriously underestimated and even mocked for much of the year, celebrity physician Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania, Hillbilly Elegy author J.D. Vance in Ohio, football player Herschel Walker in Georgia, and possibly even venture capitalist Blake Masters in Arizona should combine to give control of the Senate to Republicans, who are more than ever the party of Trumpist nationalism.

Boosted by widespread dissatisfaction with the high cost of living and the economic reverberations of the pandemic lockdowns that were never satisfactorily addressed, regaining control of the House is a safer bet. At the extremes, Democratic governors in Michigan and New York might come close to losing, and shocking upsets in liberal strongholds like Washington and Oregon remain within the realm of possibility.

Trumpism has always been a reaction to neoliberalism’s inequities, the former’s white supremacist dimension having been much exaggerated, though it remains a real subtext. The anxiety that manifests as nationalism all across the world is a distorted cultural response to neoliberalism’s hard refusal to loosen its stranglehold on economies.

Precisely the same dynamic is colouring the new shades of Trumpism as was the case with the original. Neoliberalism refuses to acknowledge the real pain of economically marginalised classes, including poor whites, boxing the latter into a category beyond redemption and charging them with innate racism. It is neoliberalism’s only way of warding off populist uprisings on both the right and the left in response to out-of-control inequality, which only got shockingly worse during the pandemic.

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The Biden administration has done its best to change the conversation. It never put in place a serious public health policy to deal with the effects of the pandemic, restricting the sphere of action to mandatory vaccinations, following the hugely unpopular lockdowns. The administration was more than happy to empower a couple of fringe senators within the Democratic Party to block even the token social welfare agenda it began with. Facing imminent annihilation in the midterms, it passed a mislabelled Inflation Reduction Act, which is actually a climate bill that does little to address the accelerating climate apocalypse, and has not fooled the people. A minimal student debt forgiveness programme already faces legal challenges, and is hardly a drop in the bucket compared to the scale of indebtedness.

More importantly, liberals have placed their heaviest bet on what they call the ‘defence of democracy’. Strict censorship and disinformation rules have been in place to block ‘election denialism’, while the Jan 6 congressional hearings have failed to find traction with anyone not already in the anti-Trump camp. Most people rightly view these proceedings as auth­oritarian overreach, precisely the sin for which liberals blame the Trumpists. The government raid on Trump’s Florida redoubt, Mar-a-Lago, has been correctly interpreted as more of the same persecution, built on a tendentious national security justification that leaves any objective observer indifferent.

Trump was never the out-and-out fascist neoliberals claimed him to be, and there was much overlap, at least in the beginning, between his brand of populism and Bernie Sanders’s leftist populism. The paths diverged during Trump’s presidency, which emphasised a libertarian economics with sharply reduced corporate tax rates, but it was by no means a continuation of neoliberalism, particularly in the areas of trade and migration. What will follow in the wake of the midterm reckoning will be more of the same economic libertarianism, in the push for unlimited oil and gas drilling, more corporate tax cuts and attacks on the social safety net, and a new thrust for the border wall to keep exploited labour in its lamentable condition.

The Democrats, on the other hand, have been the unabashed war and national security party since the original Trump ascendancy. None of their leading candidates running for different levels of government in the midterms have shown any real reservations about the Ukraine war, while the Republicans have at least expressed serious doubts, particularly about the risks of nuclear war. In this upside down world, the left is for war and empire, while the right is for retreat and withdrawal. For the rest of the world, the latter is a better outcome, as we can already tell from the initiation of yet another forever war.

In place of Trump’s haphazard protectionism against China — he was the first major American figure to make an issue of China’s growing dominance — the liberals have started a chip war, whose final outcome remains unknown, but might be determinative in the race for global hegemony. Unable to state the nature of the problem as such, neoliberalism only permits distorted manoeuvres, while refusing to develop human resources at home, which is ultimately the only fount of national superiority.

All of the candidates mentioned at the outset, such as the Turkish-American Oz, or the offspring of struggling Appalachian ancestors Vance, have wrapped themselves in an America First mantle whose vocabulary derives from the very real dissatisfactions following neoliberal dehumanisation, which have afflicted not just poor whites but also people of colour who don’t have an entry point into the so-called meritocracy.

Aspects of this America First agenda, such as its obsession with the border, and linking crime to foreign infestation and the alleged ‘great replacement’ of whites by minorities, are regrettable, but liberals only provide legitimacy to this entire spectrum of nationalist ideology by mislabelling every populist uprising as a threat to democracy itself.

On Nov 8, Trump and his fellow travellers will have their revenge. The holding pattern for neoliberalism that Biden was brought in to maintain, by forcefully shoving out the left populist movement dur­­ing the 2020 primaries, will come to an end. Whe­ther or not Trump himself decides to run in 2024, his movement will have notched a major victory, and legislatures across the country will awaken to a new reality, where crime, migration and inflation will be tackled in ever more sadistic and nihilistic terms.

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*Published in Dawn, November 5th, 2022*