



America votes – three scenarios

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On November 8, America will re-elect the House of Representatives and a third of the Senate – but there is so much more at stake. It's about the future of the USA, democracy and a possible comeback by Donald Trump. The USA expert Josef Braml outlines three scenarios for "The Pioneer", which could happen depending on the election's outcome.

On November 8, US voters cannot directly confirm or vote out the President. But via the midterm elections, even if only all 435 MPs and a third of the 100-strong Senate stand for election, they have an indirect opportunity to have a say in their head of state's domestic and foreign policy room for manoeuvre. In the worst case, US President Joe Biden's ability to act will be curtailed by the congressional elections, thereby also enabling Donald Trump's return to the White House. But this is only one of three possible scenarios:

"First Best" scenario

Meanwhile, especially after the Supreme Court's abortion ruling, it looked as if a counter-mobilization would help Democrats defend majorities in both houses of Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate. Biden would have achieved what few presidents before him have achieved in US history: after two years in office, they did not lose seats and majorities in Congress in the midterm elections. US President Biden would emerge stronger from the congressional elections - also with a view to his future leadership and possible re-election in two years.

But only when the "bread and butter" issues, i.e. basic economic needs, are satisfied, can moral issues play a decisive role. Even in America today, food comes first, then morality. In the USA, it is mostly about moral issues below the waistline, i.e. questions of sexual morality such as gay marriage and, above all, abortion. For a long time after the Supreme Court – thanks to the three judges nominated by Trump – overturned the national right to abortion, it seemed that a strong mobilization, especially from liberal women, would noticeably harm Republicans in the congressional election.

Due to the short-sighted actions of the incumbent President, however, economic issues have once again come to the fore and pushed "moral issues" back into the background. Ironically, the fact that US President Biden has more or less continued the protectionist trade policies of his Republican predecessor, Trump, plays into the hands of Republicans. The decoupling or "friend shoring", i.e. a wide disentanglement of Western economies from China's planned economy, causes deglobalization and thus also drives up prices. In other words, Biden's continuation of Trump's protectionism is fueling inflation that threatens to get on the Democrats' feet domestically.

The oil sanctions imposed on Russia by the Biden government also come at a high political price. Their boomerang effect on the US economy gives Republicans a better chance of voting because the oil prices that have risen due to the sanctions also affect the US population, especially through noticeably higher fuel prices. What's more: the Russia sanctions are also fueling inflation, which is forcing the US Federal Reserve to adopt an all the more restrictive monetary policy, which in turn is likely to lead to further slumps in the stock markets and the economy in America.

The precarious economic situation plays into the hands of the Republicans politically. It's the economy, stupid! The two top issues that concern US voters the most are inflation and the economy. According to a recent Washington Post and ABC News poll, three out of four Americans say the economy is either "not so good" or "bad." And this issue favours Republicans. Voters trust Republicans far more than Democrats regarding managing the economy.

US President Biden also disregarded the foreign policy maxims of his predecessors in the White House. The foreign policy drive of the USA can be summarized with the often quoted statement of the 30th US President Calvin Coolidge (1923-1929): "The chief business of the American people is business" - the primary concern of the Americans is business. After his short-sighted moralization of America's foreign policy, US President Biden, despite his plea to Riyadh, failed to persuade the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to cooperate - the man Biden previously wanted to pillory as a pariah in front of the world public.

With OPEC, led by Saudi Arabia, now doing the opposite and massively reducing oil production by two million barrels a day, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, who was humiliated by Biden at the time, is not only helping the Russian ruler Vladimir Putin today but also influencing it also American domestic policy in favour of the Republican Party of Trump, who has behaved much more benevolently towards him and other autocrats.

"Second Best" scenario

In a second, and currently most likely, scenario, the Democrats lose only the House of Representatives but defend their Senate majority. In this case, Biden would have more significant difficulties implementing his domestic political projects through the law.

In particular, Biden's inability to reform electoral law could prove problematic for American democracy and give his challenger Trump a better chance at a second term.

Foreign policy would also be tested, first and foremost, America's Ukraine policy, mainly since support for Kyiv is financed with American taxpayers' money. US officials doubt they can enact large aid packages for Ukraine after November's congressional elections. It, therefore, has to be approved by both chambers of Congress. Europe would be held even more responsible for overcoming the immense challenges in its immediate vicinity. Given the foreseeable social, economic and domestic political problems in the USA and what Washington sees as a more significant threat from China, America's attention is likely to shift anyway.

Priorities change, especially during election campaigns. For the purpose of Trump's re-election, he and his family will probably continue to use any means. In the previous US election campaign, Trump had already demanded that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyj cooperate with him against his challenger Biden and his son Hunter. Without incriminating evidence, Trump's undisguised threat was that the United States, under his leadership, would scale back military aid to Ukraine. Trump still senses a political target: Hunter Biden was on the payroll of the Ukrainian gas holding Burisma at \$50,000 a month, even though his father was responsible for the Ukraine dossier as Vice President during Barack Obama's term in office.

If, after the midterm elections, possible investigations again weigh on the President personally, a new Republican majority in the House of Representatives could herald impeachment proceedings against Biden. But in the absence of a two-thirds majority in the Senate chamber that is decisive for this, the "impeachment" process, as it was done twice against Trump, could be averted.

Nevertheless, the processing of the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021, which is necessary for the continued existence of US democracy, could be blocked all the more by the Republicans in Congress. Republican MPs and Senators continue to follow their People's Tribune, Donald Trump docilely; two-thirds of them stand by Trump's claim that the election was "stolen" and that Biden is not the legitimate President of the not-so-US.

Not without a political reason: Six out of ten Republican voters also believe Trump's lie that US President Biden was unlawfully elected. It is of great concern that the majority of Republican candidates running in November also contest Biden's legitimate election. Not least for fear of the possible wrath of the undisputed party leader Trump, who has politically finished off renegades, such as MP Liz Cheney. The Republicans were already brought to Trump's line in the primaries. After November's midterm elections, few Republicans will remain in office, including those who voted to impeach Trump over his actions following his election defeat.

While the candidates "chosen" in the primaries by Trump's grace are likely to be elected to the House of Representatives in November, Trump's interventions could cost the Republicans a possible majority in the Senate.

Unlike the so-called "gerrymandering" of congressional constituencies, in which only the extreme candidates win – on both sides of the political spectrum – in Senate elections, a more diverse electorate in most states mostly chooses more moderate candidates in the political centre.

However, if the political novices who were victorious in the primaries thanks to Trump's support - such as J.D. Vance in Ohio, Herschel Walker in Georgia and Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania – if, contrary to expectations, they moved into the Senate, not only would the balance of power in Congress fundamentally change in favour of the Republicans, but Trump's presidential candidacy and his return to the White House would also be all the more likely will.

"Worst case" scenario

If the power arithmetic in Congress changes fundamentally, i.e. if the Republicans win both chambers of Congress, President Biden is threatened with even more incapacity to act - not least in foreign policy. Binding treaties signed by the President under international law are only valid after ratifying them by the Senate.

The Senate must also approve presidential appointments to senior positions such as judges, ambassadors, ministers, and other top officials. The President can indeed bypass the Senate's advice and consent by appointing candidates outside of the session, i.e. via a so-called "recess appointment". But their terms of office then end with the respective legislative period, and they feel the displeasure of the senators when they exercise their office. Because the most effective means of political control is the power of the purse, Congress must or may approve the budget, especially those for executive bodies.

The blockade of the Biden government, in particular its inability to solve urgent economic and social problems, should promote Donald Trump's return to the White House. Even if he were not to run in the 2024 presidential election himself - due to possible criminal convictions - populists in Trump's image, like Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, would be in the starting blocks. Other Republican candidates could be even more challenging for Europe. This is terrible news for the Old Continent, which has placed its security in Washington's hands.

Written by

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