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## No Rules for the US Game



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The rest of the world is not yet through with US politics. Previous US mid-term elections have rarely been decisive, even when they overturned a majority in Congress. The 1994 Republican landslide principally destroyed leftwing Democrats' resistance to Bill Clinton's harsh penal policy and free trade strategy. In 2010 the Tea Party breakthrough

paralysed Barack Obama, but at a time when his campaign slogan ‘Yes, we can’ already seemed stale (1).

But the mid-terms on 6 November will mark a new stage in the US’s political polarisation, the whirlwind that has destabilised the world order for two years, insofar as the outcome will decide Trump’s fate. Both sides are so obsessed with Trump, who is determined to stand again in 2020, that they seem to have taken leave of their senses. His opponents call him a traitor who is undermining NATO and the West’s democratic values. He counters that, by opposing the building of a wall against immigrants, his accusers are letting in the violent MS-13 gang, a source of terror in the US. This mutual paranoia, amplified by social media, is now background music that won’t go quiet, even once an election is over. As a result, the parties no longer agree on the rules of engagement in this American democracy of which they were so proud that they wanted to show it off as a model to the rest of the world.

Many Democrats, when they are not calling Trump a fascist, see him as ‘Putin’s poodle’ and his victory as the result of an electoral system biased against them (true) and fake news concocted by Moscow (an exaggeration that has also become an obsession). If their party retakes Congress, it will initiate more commissions of inquiry and many Democrats will strive to impeach him (2).

This prospect fuels the anger of Trump supporters, who are still numerous, fervent and see themselves as persecuted. They believe that, despite Trump’s economic successes, the media, the intellectual elite and the ‘deep state’ are conniving to prevent him from governing. Defeat in November, far from crushing them, will fuel their belief that this cabal, electoral fraud and votes by illegal immigrants account for their setback.

Two out of three US voters are now convinced the system is rigged against the average citizen, a rare point of bipartisan agreement (3). They have reason to believe this, since both parties are oligarchic. But the tenor of their current, highly personalised confrontation suggests that salvation for the average American is still some way off.

#### **Notes.**

(1) See Eric Alterman, ‘[The compromiser-in-chief](#)’, Le Monde diplomatique, English edition, October 2011.

(2) This requires the support of two-thirds of the Senate.

(3) A view held by 75% of Democrats and 60% of Republicans. Gerald F Seib, ‘[The dangers of losing faith in democracy](#)’, The Wall Street Journal, New York, 4 July 2018.