

ما زِلْتُ أبحثُ عن شيءٍ... حينَ ضاعَ ضيَعَتِي  
(محمود درويش)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB

*I am still searching for something  
that when lost, I myself became lost.*

Mahmoud Darwish  
(Palestinian poet)

# Opinion 2022

**TOMORROW**  
Ramzy Baroud on what  
Palestinians can take from  
another year of tragedy, hope  
and numerous little victories.

## Divisions again prominent in US politics

The last year delivered significant developments in US politics — some of which surprised many political analysts and pundits. President Joe Biden worked to push forward his agenda while managing the COVID-19 pandemic and economic challenges, and the Supreme Court's new conservative majority shook up politics.

Biden's second year in the White House produced mixed results. The president faced low approval ratings all year — most recently at just over 41 percent of the public expressing approval. Inflation hit levels not seen in decades. Biden faces legal obstacles to his plan for student loan forgiveness. The Democrats' razor-thin margin in the Senate stymied their efforts to pass a voting rights bill and a ban on assault weapons.

At the same time, the country appeared to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment remained low and the Democrats chalked up major legislative victories. Biden and progressive Democrats had to accept that many of their priorities were not politically feasible; nonetheless, Biden and Democrats in Congress successfully passed significant legislation. Most notably, in August, Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act.

Despite the bill's name, it does relatively little to address inflation in the short term. However, it represents the country's largest investment in addressing climate change, including more than \$360 billion to promote cleaner energy production and other climate-related policies. The bill also includes significant provisions to reduce the price of prescription drugs for older patients and to modernize the Internal Revenue Service.

While the Inflation Reduction Act received no Republican support, Congress successfully passed some bipartisan legislation in 2022 — a major achievement at a time of heightened polarization. Recently, several Republican senators joined Democrats to pass a bill to ensure federal recognition of same-sex marriages; the House followed suit this month. Also recently, Congress passed bipartisan legislation to avert a potential strike by railway workers. In the summer, Congress approved the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act to address threats to the semiconductor supply chain. Congress also passed bipartisan measures to address gun violence, though Democrats and Biden personally had to accept significant compromises.

With a majority in the House of Representatives, Democrats were able to conduct high-profile hearings into the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. The select committee to investigate the attack held multiple public hearings. The committee's work continued to shine a spotlight on the attack and former President Donald Trump's role in it. Polls suggest that the hearings have had little impact on public opinion; however, public opinion is only one metric by which to judge the committee's influence.

A major political and legal event occurred in June, when the Supreme Court ruled in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization. The decision overruled the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, thus removing any constitutional guarantee for a woman's right to have an abortion. Legally, states may now determine their own laws regarding abortion, which will have enormous consequences for women's health.

Politically, the Dobbs ruling was an earthquake. Conservative justices have a majority on the Supreme Court after a combination of luck and unprecedented Republican maneuvers allowed Trump to appoint three justices to the court during only four years as president. Supreme Court justices serve life terms, so Trump's ability to appoint a third of the court will have long-term consequences.

The court is now far more conservative than the American public and its abortion ruling was the highest-profile example of its ability to reshape the political and legal landscape. While many conservatives celebrated the ruling, many moderates and liberals were shocked that the court took away a right that it had previously ruled was guaranteed by the US Constitution. The decision contributed to polarization, undermined public faith in the Supreme Court and played a significant role in the November elections.

The Dobbs decision and other controversial rulings made it easy to forget another important change on the Supreme Court. After Justice Stephen Breyer retired, Biden appointed Ketanji Brown Jackson, who became the first Black woman to serve on the court.



ILLUSTRATION FOR ARAB NEWS: ANTONELLO SILVERNI



KERRY BOYD ANDERSON

In November, midterm elections — held in the middle of a presidential term — yielded unusual results. Given historical trends and current realities, Republicans were expected to gain many seats in the House and potentially the Senate. While Republicans won a majority in the House, their margin is small, and they failed to retake the Senate.

Republicans did well in some states, such as Florida and New York. However, in swing states, such as Pennsylvania and Michigan, voters mostly rejected the Republican candidates who were viewed as extreme — those who often denied the results of the 2020 election, expressed their loyalty to Trump, opposed any access to abortion or refused to condemn the attack on the Capitol. Trump had helped many of these candidates win Republican primaries, but those who faced competitive general elections tended to fare poorly.

The Republican Party faces challenges going forward, as core parts of its base embrace Trump and extreme positions that do not appeal to key voters in competitive elections. Some traditional Republicans hope that Trumpism will fade, but this is wishful thinking.

In November, Trump announced that he will run again for president. He has no intention of fading away or moderating his rhetoric. Indeed, on Dec. 3, he repeated his claim that the 2020 presidential election was fraudulent and added: "A massive fraud of this type and magnitude allows for the termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution." This statement would have been viewed as very extreme and dangerous only a few years ago, but Trump has erased the red lines of American politics.



**The Supreme Court's abortion ruling was the highest-profile example of its ability to reshape the political and legal landscape**

Republicans who like some parts of Trump's approach but have tired of the man himself are seeking a new champion. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is currently the leading candidate, but there are other options. Trump remains the front-runner even though he faces growing discontent from parts of the party. In the next year, Republicans will debate the direction their party should take into the future.

In the meantime, Republicans will use their majority in the House to make life difficult for Biden. With a divided Congress, neither Republicans nor Democrats are likely to achieve much in terms of significant legislation. Instead, Republicans in the House will hold hearings into Biden administration actions and people close to the president, likely including his son, Hunter Biden.

Democrats also face divisions within their party, though they will likely be less acute than Republicans' internal divides over the next year. Some Democrats question whether Biden should run for another term as president, while moderates and liberals in the party have different views about how to run the country and contest elections.

There are many factors to watch in the year ahead that will determine the shape of American politics. Economic performance is usually important. Supreme Court decisions, House Republicans' efforts to investigate Biden, and Trump's behavior and statements will all play roles. There are growing concerns about the potential for political violence and assassinations. The health of aging leaders — Biden recently turned 80 years old and Trump is 76 — might matter. Underlying all of these issues will be a commitment to partisan perspectives by many Americans, while others increasingly long for a more moderate path.

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