

# U.S. DESPERATE TO AVOID HOME TRUTHS

*The November election won't change much*

JONATHAN TASINI

THE Illinois primary results made clear what has been obvious for a long time: Mitt Romney will be the Republican nominee for US president this year. Romney's opponents, the media and a gaggle of think-tank experts have stirred up a facade of competition, each for some personal gain or imperative. By doing so, they have ignored a more central truth: the US election will change very little, foreshadowing more division and political upheaval because neither party is prepared to cope with a deep disquiet coursing through the American public.

To be sure, each party wraps itself in a different ideological brand. Republicans, for example, will surely use the White House to continue a withering campaign to wipe out unions. Democrats will defend and expand Barack Obama's healthcare plan.

But it won't matter. No one is forecasting a wave election; that is,

a big shift towards one party that sweeps away huge numbers of the opposing party's incumbents in congress and delivers the White House.

Rick Santorum was the best path to a wave election for the Democrats: he frightened enough independents with his Bible-thumping moralising that Democrats were, uh, praying for his ascendancy while Republican-linked lobbyists quaked with visions of an election debacle and the aftermath of vanishing access and shrinking pay cheques. With Romney the nominee, however, that's off the table.

In the very unlikely event the Republicans pull off a political trifecta — holding the House of Representatives, accomplishing the plausible goal of winning just enough seats to forge a 51-seat majority in the Senate and grabbing the White House — they will have to govern within limits im-

posed by a need to cobble together a filibuster-proof 60 votes in the Senate, a threshold even the most delirious Republican will not claim is achievable in the November election.

More important, when you take away the rhetoric, both parties are arguing within a narrow framework when it comes to the big questions of the day. Both think every economic ill can be solved by cutting corporate taxes, even though a 2007 Bush administration study showed corporations based in the US already get away on the cheap because "the US takes a below average share of corporate income in taxes compared to other developed countries". Neither party seeks higher taxes on the very wealthy, in part because the rich are also major campaign contributors.

Republican and Democrats broadly buy the obsession over a perceived debt crisis, even though leading economists such as Nobel laureates Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz and others think it pure madness to preach austerity at a time of vast joblessness and underemployment.

Both parties posture about jobs

**Most Americans believe that the elite control the economy**

but ignore a bracing, fact-based reality: the economic free market system pursued and promoted for decades is an abject failure. Thanks to the benefits of the free market, 46 million people live in poverty, the highest number recorded during the 52 years the US Census Bureau has been tracking that figure; one in five Americans does not have good-paying, full-time work and does not have a reasonable expectation that, at the end of the month, they will end up slightly in the black, not bankrupt, homeless or so deeply in debt that there is no escape.

Foreign policy is a similar story. Virtually every politician flogs so-called free trade. All are united, with minor differences, in blinding loyalty to Israel, despite the consequences of such a myopic stance. Both parties have propped up the shared vision of disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have cost the lives of thousands, the waste of trillions of dol-

lars and the destruction of the minds of tens of thousands of people such as Army Staff Sergeant Robert Bales, who stands accused of murdering 16 Afghan civilians.

Most important, both parties still eagerly promote the vision of American superiority, no matter the cost. "Winning the future" is an accepted — no, required — mantra of every major political figure who competes for public office. It is an article of faith of both parties that Americans are smarter and harder working than anyone in the world. A person who would question whether the "America is No 1" obsession is damaging — or even true — would quickly be labelled a wacko or fringe leader.

The problem is that much of the posturing rings hollow with the American people. Vast swaths of Americans, faced with a quickly vanishing hope to achieve the American dream, find the blather about whether the election will usher in the Left or the Right completely irrelevant.

In November last year, 76 per cent of the people surveyed in an NBC-*Wall Street Journal* poll agreed with this statement: "The current economic structure of the

country is out of balance and favours a very small proportion of the rich over the rest of the country. America needs to reduce the power of major banks and corporations and demand greater accountability and transparency. The government should not provide financial aid to corporations and should not provide tax breaks to the rich." Half of the respondents identified with the Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street.

And that is the upshot of where the US will find itself after the election.

Most Americans believe that the elite control the economy and are pocketing an obscene amount of wealth. They believe that most politicians care only about getting elected and not about the people, and will sell their souls to keep power. And having seen Wall Street executives and bankers destroy trillions of dollars of wealth, and throw millions of people into the streets without a job, without being held accountable, they believe that the rules don't count when it comes to jailing corporate criminals. They are correct. And this year's election will not alter those truths.