



America Speaks: 2004

Special Bulletin on
"The Debate for Democracy"

A Young India Perspective

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A FEW WORDS FROM YOUNG INDIA

The year 2004 has, as some people would say, been “fully loaded”. Political events of seismic consequences were scheduled and they did indeed take place. We at Young India anticipated the historical significance of the political happenings this year and have written about and organized events to understand two of them - Indian Parliamentary Elections and the U.S. Presidential Election.

In the fall of 2003, Young India launched an initiative, “Debate for Democracy: 2004”. Our goal was to galvanize the democratic debate within the two democracies in an election year. And the coinciding Indian and U.S. elections in 2004 offered a unique opportunity to inform people and parliamentarians on both sides about each other’s politics.

Sharing of perspectives was a key part of our effort and so it was appropriate that eminent Indian parliamentarian Hon’ble Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar’s visit inaugurated our venture. His interactions with policy-makers set the stage for our work. We organized Congressional briefings both before (with Congressman Rush Holt [D, NJ-12]) and after (with Congressman Jim McDermott [D, WA-7]) the momentous Indian Parliamentary Elections in May. Our briefings were organized with enthusiastic bipartisan support with the India Caucus co-sponsoring both events. Congressman Joe Wilson (R, SC-2, Co-Chair India Caucus) was most encouraging and appreciative of our efforts. These briefings brought out aspects of India and its politics that are not ordinarily presented on the Hill.

We went beyond our strictly political audience and put together a half-hour U.S. Presidential Election special on TV Asia (the largest Indian satellite channel in North America) on the eve of the Presidential vote. We also collaborated with Sahara TV in India to present a half-hour special for an audience in India and 53 other countries that was aired in primetime as the election was underway here in the U.S. (More details are on our website and we invite you to read about our detailed briefing reports and other activities)

Our efforts this past year have had a two-pronged focus. One to inform, engage and better understand the political dynamics in New Delhi and Washington DC. Our efforts in the realm of religious harmony and Indo-Pakistan peace have been part of our other point of focus – human rights. In the absence of opportunity without discrimination, an essential human right, citizens will not be able to lead lives of economic and social dignity and thus compromise the quality of democracy in a country.

This bulletin has been a month in the making. It has been a great experience for us. Our initial goal was to produce a “brief” analysis of the election results. But our systems perspective made us look at many more things than we anticipated. After all our Indian election work encompassed two Congressional briefings. Hence, this effort too has been more comprehensive than our initial estimate.

Besides our keen interest in American politics there were two reasons that inspired us to create this publication. One is our desire and passion to share a holistic view of democracy with others. One of the main reasons for Young India’s existence has been to push forward an approach to politics that sees the linkages between disparate issue areas and then ties them to release the energy through new synergies. We want to share our vision of a creative politics that is progressive and beneficial to the people on whose efforts democracies have been built and are sustained. To achieve that we have to look at issues in their totality, free of ideology and prejudice, dedicated to the greater common good.

The other reason for sharing this analysis with you is to bring out some of the parallels that exist between Indian and American democracy. Recent history has made this comparison even more important. The cultural shifts in both societies have impacted the polity of both nations. We have tried to capture some of those changes and contrasted them here at a high-level. This document is just the starting point in our parallel study. We hope you find it useful.

**Board of Directors
Young India, Inc.**



INTRODUCTION

A nation polarized by a war, with a relatively shaky economy, and an ever-intense cultural battleground has spoken. President George W. Bush has been re-elected with a majority of both the popular vote and the Electoral College vote. It's also significant to note that he is the first candidate since his father in 1988 to secure more than 50% of the votes cast. This election set a record for the highest number of votes both for the winning **and** losing candidates. These numbers provide a glimpse into the deep divisions that still exist in America. One didn't really need a photo finish to know that.

The Republicans have also emerged stronger in Congress. Not that one anticipated anything different. They have strengthened their majority grip in both the House and the Senate. Congress will play a more significant role in policy-making since the "political capital" accrued by the President will diminish as 2008 approaches. The legislature will assert itself and so as we look ahead we need to pay more attention to Capitol Hill to get a sense of the country's political direction.

This special bulletin is a high-level analysis of the American electoral verdict. We have tried to identify factors that shaped this result and share with you our interpretation of them. At Young India, we are always looking ahead. At the same time we have a keen sense of history and always respect it. We begin this bulletin by examining the recent past and present but quickly move to what we feel lies ahead. And true to our mission to be pro-active, we share with you the direction we would like America to move in.

This bulletin also compares the two democratic experiments in India and the United States. We have a special interest in this comparison. We feel it will enhance understanding of democracy globally and help us improve it. It is not just a conclusion to our 2004 efforts; it is the opening of Young India's work in the area of Indo-U.S. policy.

We share with you our aspirations for Indo-U.S. relations. Election years are a good time to take stock of such relations and provide us food for thought when thinking of how to improve these ties. As we pointed out earlier we want to re-focus the bilateral relationship to areas that more directly affect the lives of common citizens. People-centric nationalism is good national policy and people-centric collaboration is great foreign policy. We give you a glimpse of some of our ideas that we intend to pursue in the coming year in this context.

Elections are times when democracy comes to life in the greatest numbers. The contributing factors in this verdict are dynamic and static analysis will not suffice. Our analysis of them along with our approaches to deal with them will continue to evolve beyond the date of this publication. We strongly urge you to visit our website – <http://www.yidream.org> – to get our latest take on these and other issues that we feel will shape this young century. We present to you an analysis of the great forces that are molding American democracy today and will continue to do so in the years to come. The collective energy of the electorate has inspired us as well and we now share some of that inspiration with you.



WHAT DID AMERICA TELL US? A STATISTICAL LOOK AT THE RESULTS

Going into the election the campaigns, the debates, and the much-touted polls had well laid out the issues that were going to play a role in deciding the race. The media and the democrats underestimated one – “values”. And that seems to have been the difference in the closest and most decisive of races – Ohio. But beyond this history-making emphasis on “values” there are other trends and statistics that shed light on the political and cultural character of America.

Here are some exit poll statistics that people interested in the democratic process should pay attention to:¹

Popular Vote²:

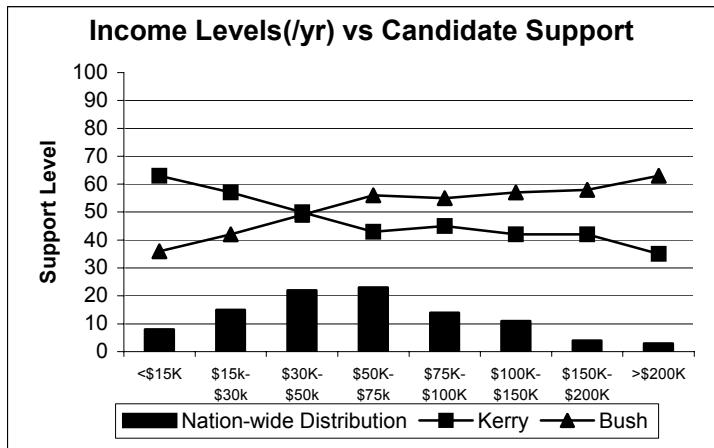
- George W. Bush (R) = **60.61 million** (51%, greatest number of votes ever for **any** candidate)
- John Kerry (D) = **57.29 million** (48%, greatest numbers of votes ever for a **losing** candidate)

Electoral Vote:

- George W. Bush (R) = **286 of 538**
- John Kerry (D) = **252 of 538**

Note: % of Total = % of Total Electorate

Issue	% of Total	Kerry	Bush
Taxes	5	43	57
Education	4	73	26
Iraq	15	73	26
Terrorism	19	14	86
Economy/Jobs	20	80	18
Moral values	22	18	80
Health care	8	77	23



¹ Exit Poll data from the National Election Pool procured from MSNBC.com.

² Election results from MSNBC.com



Race	% of Total	Kerry	Bush
White	77	41	58
Black	11	88	11
Hispanic/Latino	8	53	44
Asian	2	56	44
Other	2	54	40

Gender	% of Total	Kerry	Bush
Male	46	44	55
Female	54	51	48

Age Group	% of Total	Kerry	Bush
18-29	17	54	45
30-44	29	46	53
45-59	30	48	51
60 or over	24	46	54

Party Affiliation	% of Total	Kerry	Bush
Democrat	37	89	11
Republican	37	6	93
Independent	26	49	48

Other Interesting Results to note:

- Evangelical/Born-Again Christians:
23% of total vote (approx. **19 million**),
78% of this group voted for George W. Bush
- Other Christians:
77% of total vote
56% of this group voted for John Kerry
43% of this group voted for George W. Bush



WHY AMERICA SAID WHAT IT DID

America said a lot of different things on November 2nd, 2004. It's hard to uncover a national message coming out of these elections. Based on the statistics presented in this bulletin we have listed some of the decisive issues of this election that we feel tell a lot about today's America: A nation split along many lines.

Moral “Values”

This issue was the biggest surprise to most observers except chief Bush campaign strategist Karl Rove. It was a factor in previous elections but not one that decided voter's choice. The exit poll whose data we have used to prepare this report when reporting similar information in 2000 did not show moral "values" being a vote deciding issue to any significant statistical degree. Statistics reveal that between 2000 and 2004 the percentage of the electorate that called itself conservative went from 29% to 35% and those calling themselves moderates dropped by 5% points from 50% to 45%. Those calling themselves liberals dropped 1% point to 20%. This is a trend of serious political significance explaining to some degree the existing state of polarization. And it greatly helped George W. Bush.

There is a reason why we have the words "values" within quotes. There is ambiguity about the term "values". One person's values may be another's vices. So, a general discussion about "values" is almost impossible in a puritanical way. We would, however, like to share with you the "values" that brought out the vote for George W. Bush.

Many analysts have put the sub-issues of gays and abortion at the top of the "values" debate for that section of the American population that gave the incumbent the biggest and most decisive boost – Evangelical/Born-Again Christians. The evangelicals are swelling in numbers in the southern United States. Believing in the Bible literally, the gay and abortion issues have politically galvanized this block of voters.

Of the 11 states that had ballot measures to ban gay-marriage, only two, Michigan and Oregon, were won by John Kerry. The measure to ban was approved in all 11 states. The margin of victory for Kerry in Michigan and Ohio was far closer than the margin for Bush in the other nine states. The effect of this issue being on the ballot was more decisive in Ohio than anywhere else. Many now believe – as do we – that having this issue on the ballot brought out the evangelicals who then overwhelmingly voted for Bush.

The "values" issue goes deeper than gay marriage and abortion, however. School boards across the South have been trying to replace teaching the theory of evolution with creationism. Efforts to place monuments with the Ten Commandments inscribed on them at public institutions like the courts; school prayer; a strengthening movement that focuses more on abstinence rather than sex-education for adolescents are other issues that have inspired political action. These issues seem to sustain "value" inspired political activism and can become the focal point of future political battles. It is important to note the very local nature of a lot of these issues – school boards, county courthouses, etc. The key this time was that the Republicans were able to find issues within the realm of "values" and present them as ones with national relevance.

Economy

The number of people who had the economy as their top vote-deciding issue (20%) was just below the number of people who were most guided by moral "values" (22%) while casting their vote. Even more interesting is the breakdown of votes within these two categories of voters. Those who voted on moral "values" voted for George W. Bush 80-18%. Those who voted on the economy voted for John Kerry 80-18%.



There are two questions that intrigue us. One is whether there were too few people who saw the economy in a depressed state or moving in the wrong direction? The answer to this question is NO. There was enough economic discontent; it just was not intense enough to decide the election. The second one is whether the Republicans were able to present other issues effectively enough to focus voters on them instead of the economy? That answer here is YES. As the numbers suggest any deflection from the economy was politically beneficial for the Republicans. And in this context, the Democrats were not able to make economic discontent a strong enough voting issue. That is significant given the economic news running up to the election was more negative than it was positive.

We have shared with you the vote breakdown based on family income as well. The economy has hurt families making less than \$50,000 a year (45% of the electorate) more than those families who make more. Yet only 20% of the total population voted with economic issues on top of their list of concerns. The statistical gap between these two realities is rather significant. Of course, terrorism and Iraq were factors too, yet we feel the Democrats could have and should have done better on the economic front.

Terrorism

This was an issue on which the Democrats struggled to create any space for themselves. George W. Bush dominated this issue. And the numbers show it – 86-14% for Bush when terrorism is cited as the most important voting issue. With America being relatively safe since 9/11 and the hawkish response encapsulated in Bush's foreign policy there was a majority sentiment that believed in the “offense is the best defense” doctrine to confront it. Bush's rhetoric and actions in Afghanistan – and to a good degree in Iraq too – assured people of his tenacity to fight terrorism.

We feel this war on terrorism is ambiguous when it comes to defining the term terrorism. The degeneration of a state or non-state entity's military operation that kills and drives fear through the hearts of innocent civilians is the broader definition of the term terrorism. As our definition suggests terrorism can emanate from sovereign states as well. Neglecting to understand the causes of “terrorism” will, and to some degree has already, lead to policy that is one-dimensional, with an over-reliance on military options. We detail our views on this matter later in this bulletin. At this point we would, however, like to reiterate our position that nonviolence is the most effective strategy for mass change. We, at Young India, are specially invested in this approach as we have prepared and shared our Nonviolence Direct Action chart³ with many.

Coming back to the election, it is an inescapable reality that the Bush campaign was successful in linking Iraq to the war on terrorism. All Democratic efforts to de-link the two failed. We feel that there is still a distinct ideological component latent in the war on terrorism. And that is dangerous since it may prohibit creative and efficient responses - both in lives and treasure.

The reduction in the female vote gap (51-48% Kerry; 54-43% Gore in 2000) is being attributed to the fact that young mothers – “soccer moms” – in suburban America put security of their families above their economic and health-care problems – another example of how the Republicans were able to de-emphasize the economy and health-care and zoom in on security concerns. We call them fears because the two states that were most affected by 9/11 were New York and New Jersey. Both these states went to John Kerry.

Iraq

We need not remind people that Iraq is **still** a war-zone. Yet when it came down to the election only 15% (73% of whom voted for Kerry) of the electorate had the war on top of their decision-making list. That is not to say it did not figure in the decision of other voters. But its relative insignificance surprises us. With

³ Nonviolence Direct Action chart found at: <http://www.yidream.org/nvda.shtml> (copyright Young India)



civilian casualty estimates ranging from 15,000⁴ to a 98,000⁵ and 1,200+ U.S. casualties we felt that this issue would have weighed more prominently in people's decisions.

Only towards the very end of his campaign was John Kerry able to establish his position on the issue. The Republicans blunted his message that was not critical of the decision to go to war but of the way it was being conducted. Anti-war voters reconciled to John Kerry because of their opposition to Bush but for others, Kerry's position seemed opportunistic and thus negatively impacted his image. He was perceived as indecisive and not a better option to lead a war that they felt was right.

Fears of a draft and the siphoning of funds towards the war effort that could otherwise have been used to help out people at home didn't stick in the end. Iraq failed to be a decisive piece of the electoral puzzle. It was still an important piece but the lack of anything dramatic in Iraq as the election approached helped the Republicans and on Election Day it was relegated to an important but not key issue.

Issues and the Electorate

Most attention has been focused on issues that exit polls have reported as vote-determining issues. When we look back at the exit polls from the 2000 election some interesting facts are revealed. Terrorism and Iraq have pushed issues like taxes (5% in 2004/14% in 2000) and education (4% in 2004/15% in 2000) to the political backburner. Social security did not even register on the exit polls in 2004 compared to being the top issue for 14% of the electorate in 2000.

There is a majority in America that agrees with the Bush administration's foreign policy. On Iraq the margin in favor of Bush is small (51-45%) and the opposition is fierce but the incumbent's policy still has majority support – this may be a reflection of the similarity of policy between Bush & Kerry; perhaps voters stuck with Bush on Iraq because Kerry didn't seem to bring anything new to the table. On the issue of terrorism there seems to be no contest. Bush's support is rock solid (86-14%). But no poll exists that probes the population on what they understand by the term "terrorism". Over the past 2+ years, many critics have said that the Bush administration has used the concept of terrorism for political purposes and tied the situation in Iraq to terrorist attacks such as 9/11. The resulting high percentage of people that still feel that 9/11 was connected to Iraq is a fact that disturbs us.

One demographic that seems to have switched its political inclination is the age group of 60 and above. In 2000 this age group supported Gore 51-47% but in 2004 they went for Bush 54-46%. In 2000 that support for Gore came from his positions on social security and Medicare. In this election, social security concerns have taken a back seat to two of Bush's strengths – response to terrorism and moral "values".

As we look out to 2008 there is one group of voters that could hold the key – Hispanics. In 2000 Hispanics voted 62-35% for Gore. In 2004 that gap was reduced to 53-44% in favor of Kerry. President Bush has appointed Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General and Carlos Gutierrez as Commerce Secretary. This signals to a new political mindset within the Republican Party – realizing the political importance of the Hispanic vote. And don't rule out a Hispanic Supreme Court nominee in case a vacancy comes up. That does not mean contentious issues don't persist. Immigration bitterly divides the Republican caucus as was evident in the battles that preceded the recently passed intelligence reform bill. Although the percentage of the electorate the Hispanic community represented only increased by one percentage point (7 to 8%) the next four years could be the time that they become a political constituency to reckon with, especially in swing states like New Mexico and Florida.

The events of 9/11 caused a re-alignment in the political thinking of this nation. In that regard terrorism has expectedly emerged as a major issue – a combined 34% of the electorate listed terrorism or Iraq as the most important issue on their minds. But the emergence of moral "values" as one the most important

⁴ Estimate from the Iraq Body Count found at <http://www.iraqbodycount.net>

⁵ Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey found at http://pdf.thelancet.com/pdfdownload?uid=llan.364.9448.primary_research.31264.1&x=x.pdf or <http://www.thelancet.com>



issues is an indication of cultural forces that have been at play for decades now and have finally emerged as a major player. To understand America it is critical to keep an eye on the emergence of a new and politically significant “moral” order.

Comparing Voices from India and America

Given this publication is a part of our “2004: Debate for Democracy”, initiative it is instructive to briefly compare what both America and India said through their general elections in 2004. The rural vote seems to have shaped both verdicts but in opposite directions. In India, the rural electorate voted against the right and in favor of progressives. In America, their rural counterparts went in the other direction.

Rural India rejected the social worldview of the right as well as the implementation of their economic ideas. They punished the incumbents for their incompetence in dealing with the economic issues that most plagued them. The voices heard from the villages in India exposed a division in social and economic outlook. Urban India is more conservative and was more enthusiastic about the economic direction proposed by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Rural India felt left out and made that known.

Small town America found the Republican right-of-center social policy platform more in tune with their concerns. These rural and “exurban” Americans decided not to be too harsh on the incumbent administration on the economic front. In contrast to their right-of-center counterparts in India (the BJP), the Republicans focused their message on terrorism and social “values” avoiding economic issues. Rural America has definitely responded positively to “faith-sensitive” politicians this time. Since religion is multi-dimensional it not only talks of personal responsibility but also of social justice in the broader context. It therefore remains to be seen what aspect of politics rural America gravitates towards – personal values or values of social justice? We hope it’s a combination of both.

It will be interesting to see how the hinterland in both countries fares after making the choices they made. Will rural India begin to see fruits of the economic reform process and will rural and small-town America continue to feel that the fate of social “values” dear to them is more important than their and the nation’s economic challenges. The two societies are on different courses.



WHERE DOES AMERICA GO FROM HERE?

With all branches of the Federal government under Republican control the political landscape is set to be dominated by their moves. In this context the question we pose can more aptly be put: Where do the **Republicans** go from here? The Democratic Party is down but not dead. We also explore what Democrats need to do to make themselves statistically relevant in the political battles awaiting them. The political fault lines are clear but the cultural fault lines are a little more transient. We will have to wait and see where they settle. Traditional definitions of conservatism and liberalism are also under revision.

Domestic Policy

The Republicans have a rare political opportunity to turn their policy ideas into laws. Some of the issues that are likely to feature prominently on the domestic front are: privatization of parts of Social Security, medical malpractice reform (limiting pain and suffering awards), an energy bill that allows drilling in Alaska (something that will have environmentalists up in arms), and above all, tax reform (tax code revision to reduce the tax burden). Moreover, constituents who were the decisive factor – Evangelical Christians – will be expecting legislation that translates their ideology into legislation. But measures that may be too drastic could hurt the Republicans amongst moderates and further intensify progressive opposition. Abortion rights should be safe but the pressure to create a “pro-life” culture will only increase. This issue will be most visible if a Supreme Court nomination comes up in the next 4 years (which we assume is likely to occur). Hence, a balancing act will be needed to sustain this current state of political domination. The question of direction will be determined by how much gain the GOP wants in the short term while risking longer-term support. We believe that in seeking longer-term support, the GOP will push policy towards neo-conservatism, but not to the extremes, which many are apprehensive about.

The evangelical movement is an important aspect of American cultural life that will be worth following closely in the next few years. If the movement grows and maintains its political disposition then the politics of America could be in for a change that will directly challenge a long cherished idea of American democracy – separation of Church and State. But while the evangelical movement is perhaps the most talked about and significant of the cultural undercurrents that are transforming American culture, it is not the only one. The cultures evolving in America are increasingly divergent. These emerging cultures have increasingly little middle ground and that is something the political system can exploit. If these fissures are taken advantage of, it will be to the detriment of America and the world. The politicians on both sides may see this stark divide and come together to bridge the gaps. If they don't then some very challenging times lay ahead for American democracy.

Foreign Policy

The Bush administration is viewing its re-election as a validation of its foreign policy as well. Based on recent statements, it has little intention to change its rhetoric or course. The nomination of Dr. Condoleezza Rice as the next Secretary of State further signals a continuation of the same policy mindset since Dr. Rice was one of the key architects of it along with Vice President Cheney. We feel that the administration will persist with a multilateral approach while dealing with Iran and North Korea (with EU and the UK dealing with Iran and China leading the effort in the Korean peninsula). It will continue to desist direct, one-on-one contact with these two nations. We feel such an approach is unsustainable as these two issues are critical to global security and therefore demand more flexibility. A more direct and active engagement is mandated to diffuse the growing crises.

A renewed push in the Middle East/West Asia is likely. Part of the neo-conservative take on the Middle East/West Asia is that regime change was needed in Iraq to help stabilize the entire region and to provide a catalyst for further change - a highly debatable view to say the least. What shape the region now takes is anyone's guess especially with the recent death of Yasser Arafat. With a political change of guard in Palestine, the Bush administration and Prime Minister Sharon's government is being forced to turn their attention again to the stalled peace process with support from Britain and other influential members of the



international community. The stated reason of not having a partner in peace doesn't hold any more. Will this mean a state for the displaced nation of Palestine and security for Israel? Future actions will have to belie the track record of all parties in recent years for such a hopeful scenario to materialize. Yet we are hopeful.

If fair elections are held in Iraq in January 2005 then the Bush administration will claim victory. But such an occurrence is not guaranteed given the current security situation in the country. The electoral process may bring ethnic divisions to the fore again. Iraq will unfortunately remain volatile for the time being. The Bush administration will start thinking of an exit strategy soon and we expect "feelers" to be leaked to judge the reaction to different strategies. Things will get really complicated if a fundamentalist government is established through the democratic process. Iraq will continue to dominate the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda. No doubt, the coming months in Iraq will shape the future of any Middle East/West Asia peace accords.

We feel that the current definition of security is too limiting. It does not include real and present dangers such as environmental degradation, pandemics like AIDS, increasing economic insecurity, etc. Despite the recent passing of the Kyoto Accord in Russia, we do not see any major global environmental moves coming from Washington. We hope we are proven wrong on this account. We do, however, envision a vigorous anti-AIDS campaign. It will be interesting to see how the President interacts with a more right-wing Congress with respect to what type of anti-AIDS programs to support, especially when it comes to abstinence programs. We hope that this is not at the expense of programs that promote safe sex and condoms. Holding the fight against AIDS captive to ideology can and will have fatal consequences. Such inclinations must be challenged.

We feel that free trade will continue to gain strength and without the political pressure of a re-election the administration may be more amiable to the WTO. The issue of agricultural subsidies will continue to dominate the global trade negotiations. America will have to address its unfair practices as it challenges those abroad. The Bush Administration will have to balance the reality of free/fair trade practices with the American desire of operating in the country's "best" interests.

America will also have to broaden its response to terrorism if it desires to address the problem long-term. Unfortunately, there are no clear signals emanating from the administration that would indicate a change in strategy. A one-dimensional aggressive approach can alienate and disillusion large sections of the world. The President's preserving his defense and foreign policy team makes it hard to see a change in course. We hope that all missions for peace are successful but so far success has been elusive and costly. America must pay heed to what the world thinks about it as obstacles to peace become multi-dimensional, thus necessitating the need for broader coalitions. Today America has been thrust into a position of leadership. It will have to rise to the challenge with vision and humility. In that vein, we argue that a greater emphasis on non-military responses to terrorism is needed to ensure long-term security throughout the globe. We share our ideas to achieve this later in the bulletin.

This election was a great victory for the neo-conservatives. Despite multiple failures and mistakes their ideas have impressed an electoral majority, giving them life for another four years. They now have a chance to establish themselves and hopefully correct some of their mistakes. We can always hope. Their effect will be most visible in the continuation of an aggressive war on "terrorism". The doctrine of pre-emption will be bolstered if there is any semblance of order in Iraq. But we feel they are treading a treacherous terrain. Another terrorist attack on the American mainland could force the nation to seriously call into question the efficacy of the current approach. If people at home continue to feel that their civil liberties are eroded then the small majority the neo-conservatives have won this time will soon evaporate. The fate of the neo-conservative movement hinges on the success of President Bush's second term.



Future for the Democrats

The current state of the Democratic Party reminds us of the Indian National Congress after their defeat to the BJP in 1999. Just as the Democrats find themselves today in a weakened minority against an aggressive majority, so did the Indian National Congress after their defeat to the BJP in 1999. It is interesting to note that both winners of the 1999 Indian election and the 2004 U.S. election have similar political persuasions. The losers too share similar political ideologies. In 2004 the Indian National Congress redeemed itself by winning the general election albeit with a coalition of other parties. Can the Democrats do the same in the 2006 Congressional races or the 2008 General Election?

The dilemma that the Democrats are facing is similar to what many traditionally progressive political parties are struggling with the world over. Progressives are being forced to play defense. Issues that have traditionally helped Democrats win elections are still important but issues like moral “values” have emerged and the Democrats have not been able to politically address them. The operating philosophy that moral “values” are implicit in their policy platforms seems to be presumptuous in the current scenario. The principled hesitation not to use faith explicitly in electioneering is being called into question. The Democrats for the sake of their survival have to take on the moral “values” challenge. They will have to articulate their policy positions in the context of the most fundamental values of all faiths. We feel that the Democrats and progressives elsewhere need to acknowledge faith as part of the political discourse today. They should, however, resist with all their might the institutionalizing of religion by government. Such a principled approach will broaden the scope of the democratic dialogue while preserving the separation of church/religion and state.

It is key for the Democrats to demonstrate in the coming years why people should vote **for them** rather than **against** Republican candidates. The run up to the November elections and exit poll results show that many people who voted for Kerry actually voted **against** Bush, but the majority of Bush voters voted **for** their candidate. While this can be seen as semantics, the fundamental issues that the Democratic Party should relate to the public are why they exist, what they support, and how they will lead. Existing simply to oppose the party in power is not a mandate for long-term viability. Political viability can only be found when the public has reason to believe in the party and currently, many progressives are questioning what it will take for the Democratic Party to regain power. A rebound can only be based on effective communication of the party’s core values. It must lead by articulating these values in the context of the issues that are most concerning America.

We are not going to speculate who should or should not lead the Democrats. The crisis the Democratic Party is facing is not hinged on leadership alone. It is based on how they are able to communicate their message. And we are sure that the Democrats will be able to produce leaders who can articulate this new message. They should, however, not forget who they are. No one believes in a party that does not believe in itself. The Democrats need to take an incremental approach by first narrowing the gap in 2006. That will be a good first step.



WHERE WOULD WE LIKE TO SEE AMERICA GO?

America is truly at a crossroads. Challenges during the Clinton Years seem far in the past and there are many new hurdles to be faced.

Domestic Policy

Whatever is said about the Bush Administration, one cannot deny that the President has brought a willingness to make huge changes to many policy areas. This willingness drove the Congress to enact many laws that Americans can feel in their everyday lives. No longer is any policy area “untouchable”. This sets the stage for significant legislative battles in President Bush’s second term. We share some of them with you.

Challenges at Hand

Education

Meeting the needs of a new global economy demands an overhaul of the American education system. Education Policy was one of the first areas in which the Bush Administration oversaw significant change. With the No Child Left Behind Act, policymakers came to terms with the current state of the American primary and secondary education system. It is badly in need of improvement, and the Act provides for some of the first steps to meaningful change. Standard measures across the country will help to provide an objective view into exactly where and what type of improvement is needed. Those standards, however, should be decided upon with great care ensuring all-round development of students. Across the country, there is pain being felt at the beginning of this movement towards standard measurements (both in definitions and funding), but we are pleased to see policymakers making headway into this area that has long needed improvement. It is, however, important to strongly emphasize that testing can never replace teaching. More testing is required but not at the expense of instruction. The funding to achieve these goals is the moral responsibility of lawmakers on Capitol Hill and President Bush. Otherwise this effort could come to be viewed as a political gimmick alone. The goodwill that the bill generated at its passing must now be used to push forward the complete funding it deserves.

Taxes

Another controversial area of action under the Bush Administration has been tax policy. While there are multiple opinions on the effectiveness of changes to tax policy in the past four years, the simple fact is that the federal tax burden on the middle and lower classes has been reduced since President Bush came into office. Many loopholes allowing tax dodging have been closed. The IRS is actively pursuing tax evaders with a greater percentage and total number of convictions⁶, however there is conflicting information about the efficacy of IRS criminal investigations with annual budget cuts⁷. With the prospect of further and longer term or permanent tax cuts being proposed, we hope to see greater progress in the areas of closing loopholes and in the pursuit of unpaid taxes. Targeted tax cuts and credits for college tuitions, child care, and the like can be a boon to the nation as a whole, but only if appropriate consideration is taken on the full impact of federal tax cuts – including the effect on state and local taxes, social programs, and the relative effect on businesses. Any tax reform must pass the test of long-term fiscal responsibility. This is a policy mindset that all democracies should incorporate in governance.

⁶ IRS - Three Fiscal Years Trends in Investigations - Criminal Investigation (CI) found at <http://www.irs.gov/compliance/enforcement/article/0,,id=107484,00.html>

⁷ IRS Oversight Board testimony found at <http://www.treas.gov/irsob/releases/pr092402.pdf>



Social Security

Solutions to ensure that Social Security remains solvent may be controversial, but it cannot be denied that new policy is definitely needed. Economists have forecasted a fiscal crisis for Social Security within our lifetimes; the longer the nation waits to address this looming crisis, the more painful the changes will be. The Bush Administration has declared privatization of some aspects of Social Security as the way towards the future. Democrats must work in concert with Republican leadership to ensure that whatever policy results, it does not leave a gap in funding and does not leave the really big problems for future generations to address. Here too, fiscal health of the nation has to be of paramount importance. Assisting in a dignified ageing process is an obligation of civilized society.

Health Care

Recent Medicare policy changes have left many with a bitter taste in their mouths. The reforms were to ensure that seniors could buy medication at discounted prices while still maintaining choice of medical care. Government should interfere with markets as little as possible, but its incredible purchasing power must be used to negotiate better discount prices with drug companies. Drug makers are still able to charge the same or increasing amounts for important drugs. If there isn't significant relief in dealing with the problems of prescription drugs then we feel the Republicans will have a serious political problem on their hands. According to the exit polls 54% of the electorate already feels that President Bush is more sympathetic to corporations than to ordinary Americans⁸. Any perception of favoritism towards the pharmaceutical industry can extract a significant political cost.

Medical reform in the coming years, must not simply address drug coverage for seniors, but it must address health care for the estimated 45 million Americans who don't have any form of health insurance⁹. Preventative care is another area, which should be addressed pro-actively. Reform in these policy areas may cost the nation in the short term, but it will help to avoid paying much more dearly in the future.

The health care issue has an important economic front as well. With 70% of the labor force employed by small businesses it is essential to remove obstacles for more small businesses to grow while sustaining the existing ones. Skyrocketing health care costs for employees is one of the biggest impediments for these entrepreneurs. If the employment challenge of a new economy has to be met then we would like America and other democracies too to address the issue of health care with a sense of urgency not just from a social standpoint, but also from an economic one.

Immigration

President Bush presented some bold ideas at beginning of his first term on this matter of great importance. His ideas didn't get any legislative backing and thus lost momentum, especially after the 9/11 attacks; gladly there has been a renewed focus on immigration policy since Bush's re-election. The recent battle over the inclusion of immigration measures in the recent intelligence reform bill brought out the deep divisions on this issue. We feel that approaching the immigration issue in a way that addresses the reality on the ground – millions of illegal immigrants who now have families and livelihoods here – is essential. At the same time extra care must be taken to set the correct legal precedent to discourage illegal immigration which in addition to creating a security challenge both strains social services as well as subjects hard-working immigrants to unfair labor practices. Immigration should be addressed more broadly under the auspices of NAFTA that already allows free flow of capital and goods; it should include labor as well. After all globalization encompasses labor too.

⁸ National Election Pool data from the MSNBC.com website

⁹ US Census Bureau data from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlthins.html>



Foreign Policy

American leadership will continue to play a crucial role in international affairs. In the past few years America has lost significant diplomatic capital across the globe. We have heard both sides of the argument on this issue. Like every nation America should protect itself. But we live in a world where collective security is increasingly the way to national security. This does not mean that any nation or a group of nations has a veto over the security of any sovereign state. Multilateralism that enables such a new security paradigm seems strategically smart to us. Unilateralism that is shortsighted cannot secure America in the long-term. As the unique circumstances that America found itself in after 9/11 “normalize”, a long-term strategic partnership with the rest of the world is necessary. ***These efforts have to go beyond military cooperation.***

We would like to see President Bush's passion for liberty and freedom, include the struggle for economic liberty and freedom as well. We would like to see his faith guide him to sincerely tackle the issues of global poverty. He has a unique opportunity to put his faith in action. We would like to see America become a force for dignity of the weakest amongst us – both at home and abroad.

Challenges at Hand

Terrorism

The word terrorism has dominated our psyche since September the 11th. With 3,000 innocent lives lost, it is all but natural that national security dominates U.S. foreign engagement. National security, however, cannot be achieved through physical security alone. Not only does the **U.S.** response need to be more holistic, so does it have to be for **all nations** fighting this scourge. “Terrorism” needs to be addressed in two ways simultaneously. One is the law enforcement response that deals with the criminality and mal-intent of entities determined to hurt innocent civilians and democratic institutions. Unfortunately most governments stop right here. The other area governments fighting terrorism need to focus upon is **cutting off the emotive and financial sources of the terrorists**. That can only be done by adjusting policy to deprive terrorists of propaganda and, above all, recruits.

We would like to see America learn from the experiences of other nations. India is now making inroads into the vexed issue of Kashmir by focusing increasingly on the democratic process in the region. The Indian government's unilateral reduction in troops from the state is an example of the kind of de-escalation that is an important strategic step. This change in mindset on the Indian side took a while to come about. Similarly, America should re-think its Middle East/West Asia policy. Support to Israel should continue but not at the cost of the legitimate and long-standing aspirations of the Palestinian people for nationhood. We condemn the violence of entities like *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* that has forced Israelis to live in perpetual insecurity. We are equally critical of actions and disproportionate responses of the Israeli Defense Forces that have made the daily lives of the Palestinian people miserable through their humiliation and disruption of their most basic activities. We strongly urge moderates on both sides to assert themselves. The United States can deal a body blow to radicalism of the Al-Qaeda kind if it can convince people in the region of its sincerity to see a meaningful state for the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership too needs to meet their end of the bargain. It goes without saying that the Bush administration must pledge allegiance to the principles of democracy and justice rather than the policies of the Israeli government when they are antithetical to those principles. Good friends can disagree at times. The United States should support all efforts for peace that come forward in goodwill and a sincere desire for the violence-scarred people of Israel and Palestine.

The United States should hold the Russian government accountable for extreme measures taken in Chechnya in response to the separatist movement. The Bush administration should insist on peace talks. It is time that America becomes the voice of the weak and not stand by powerful dictatorial governments that go about dismantling democracy. Recent American efforts have been met with



hostility throughout the world and it does seem difficult to attain the moral ground in the international arena. However, American policy-makers must persist in seeking it.

To that end, addressing the full scope of terrorism requires a deep understanding of the root causes of such violence. Investigating these causes does not legitimize or give reason for terrorism; it can actually help to build effective ways to thwart further terrorism by showing us why people would resort to such brutality. Some activities are rooted in territorial in-fighting or religious zeal; other activities are rooted in more fundamental human rights. By addressing root causes or removing excuses for violent fervor, governments can effectively reduce and extinguish the emotive and financial reasons for many types of terrorism.

We feel that in its fight against “terrorism”, there is much that the United States and India can cooperate on. These two nations are like two different poles of civilization today and a closer relationship between the two will help bridge the cultural gap that terrorists and their overzealous opponents are exploiting. Beyond intelligence sharing, the two nations must work together to bring economic hope to the regions where terrorism is being bred today. The final battle will be won through persuasion not coercion.

Iraq

Iraq will continue to be the most pressing challenge in American foreign policy. We agree with the notion that Saddam Hussein was a dictator with a horrendous record of human rights. His own people should have brought Mr. Hussein to justice and through an indigenous movement for democracy like the ones we saw in the Baltics and other Eastern European nations in the late 1980's. We do not believe that democracy can be thrust upon a nation with the historical and cultural complexity of Iraq. If we believe the argument that the Iraqis were not able to fight the regime themselves the administration should have played a supporting role to credible opposition (which was pathetically lacking).

The war in Afghanistan has been a relatively more successful and acceptable venture in comparison. However, the number of civilian casualties there too has not been disclosed. With the opium trade reaching new heights and security outside Kabul poor, serious concerns persist. Even though elections were held in peace, it is too soon to call Afghanistan a success. However, with the Taliban regime gone the true culture of the Afghan people is on the march again. Iraq is a far more complex entity and so the relative success in Afghanistan cannot be extrapolated to the situation in Iraq. At least in Afghanistan there was indigenous military support and an insurgency that is less organized than what we see in Iraq today.

The American presence in Iraq is a reality now. And we feel that as important a lesson the administration must learn from its mishandling of the military and administrative part of the operations in Iraq, it faces a challenge that requires serious input from all – even those who opposed the invasion in the first place. The pain of innocent civilians in Iraq who have lost their entire families, livelihoods and all sense of security, is hard to bear. It is heartbreaking to see the names of the service men and women lost displayed on television. Our hearts also go out to the anguished families of soldiers killed in action. This war must end soon. We want to see a democratic Iraq as well but that will not be achieved through military force alone. And ill-conceived military action will only take the public away from the ideals for which America contends to be fighting. The administration must introspect for the benefit of all.

We would like to see an unconditional invitation to other nations and the UN to join in this effort. This is not the time to bicker over contracts and administrative control. This is the time to save Iraq and the United States **cannot** and **should not** do it alone. Each day that is lost in bridging the gap between the U.S. and the UN and its members pushes Iraq back further and further. This is not the time for ideology bereft of realism but rather a time requiring all of us to pull together for our brothers and sisters in Iraq. America must lead NOW.



Weapons of Mass Destruction and Nuclear Proliferation

With weapons of mass destruction acquiring a central place in the Bush foreign policy game plan, nuclear proliferation is rightly an issue of intense focus. We, however, have questions about the approach to achieve this goal. For non-proliferation to work, the existing nuclear powers must lead the way. Ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and revisiting the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to urge India and Pakistan to sign would be great first steps. Ideas like developing low yield nuclear weapons, as “bunker-busters” must be abandoned. America is looked upon as a role model by many nations that want to emulate its ideals and success. Because of its place in the world, America has the unenviable task of balancing its security needs with its leadership responsibilities.

Iran and North Korea should most certainly be persuaded to give up their nuclear weapons program. There have been breakthroughs with respect to Iran’s nuclear program, but the world must follow-up on promises made to ensure that clandestine programs do not continue. Iran must be persuaded that nuclear weapons will heighten tension in the region and negatively impact its own security. Steps must be taken to bring North Korea into the community of nations by giving that country development and trade incentives. The broader the diplomatic coalitions to persuade nations with nuclear aspirations, the better are the chances of success. This does not discount our initial point that in the particular context of Iran and North Korea, direct and more conciliatory gestures will surely help diffuse the tension. But in a larger context the United States and other nuclear powers must become sincere about nuclear disarmament – not just with suspect countries, but also with their own national security policies.

The thought of terrorists getting their hands on a nuclear device has become a serious concern. Poorly guarded nuclear weapons repositories in the former Soviet republics present themselves as an easy access point for terrorists to acquire the components for a radioactive bomb. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, U.S. administrations have committed themselves to help secure these sites. This commitment must continue and the pace of securing these sites should be picked up. In our opinion, this remains the single-most important action that the President can take to prevent radioactive devices landing up in the hands of terrorist organizations.

Emphasizing economic development de-emphasizes militarization as an acceptable model for development and recognition. In contrast to the causes that give birth to terrorism the genesis of nuclear aspirations is a more complex process. Most nations cite security as their primary motivations to seek these deadly weapons, but there are greater political and economic forces at play. It is this set of economic and political persuasions that need to be understood. Nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea have been initiated more for self-preservation by regimes that have no popular support than any real concern for the security of their people. Promoting democracy in these nations would be one way to diminish the urgency and desire to pursue these weapons. Global leaders such as the United States, the EU, Russia and India thus have a special obligation to ensure that it is the economic well being of their citizenry that guides more and more leaders and not their appetite for weapons and domination.

Thinking outside the Box

America must break new ground in collectively addressing some long-standing problems. It can do so by furthering its tradition of pushing the limits of science and innovation.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “I want a nation built on the production of the masses. Not on mass production.” Extrapolating from this statement, policy-makers must ensure an environment of economic growth where employment is a central goal. Employment is critical to leading a life of dignity and social value. The board of this organization appreciates and understands the grand benefits of technological progress. At the same time we realize that the forces of industrialization and globalization are leading to many losing their jobs. A good way to empower citizens is to inspire small business entrepreneurship. We feel that if the Mahatma were alive today he would be promoting small businesses just like he championed the cause of village industries.



America has spearheaded small business development by employing more than half of its labor force in these businesses¹⁰. If the Bush administration wants to regain its position of moral prominence in the world it could go a long way in doing so by encouraging similar development models in other nations. Instead of simply making it easy for large U.S. corporations to access foreign markets, the administration should focus on creating opportunities for American small businesses in other nations. By virtue of their size these small businesses will seek partners of similar size in other nations. This direct interaction with entrepreneurs across oceans is one way to bring the global impact of progress home to more families.

Along with innovation at the entrepreneurial level, America can lead the 21st Century with scientific innovation trans-nationally. While the U.S is still a leader in space, medicine, and software, further commitment is needed to bring benefits of these areas to everyone, not just those with money or technology. The lives of a great many in the world can be improved by developing programs, which enable them to utilize these innovations. For instance, villagers around the world may not need the ability to develop interactive software, but tools designed with their needs in mind could certainly help them take advantage of medical and agricultural expertise in big cities.

America has a critical role in our collective search for renewable sources of energy. Taking the lead in this endeavor, which has the potential to impact every person on the planet, will tremendously enhance America's stature. We have thus far met energy needs through fossil fuels at a very heavy cost to our local environments and global climate. The United States must spearhead the search for alternative sources of energy that are renewable and friendly to the environment. We feel that it is great folly to let market forces guide our consumption of fossil fuels like crude oil. The prices of these resources, as set by the market, disguise their non-renewable character and as such this is a myopic view. Since energy is a global concern a prominent American role will bring together many nations in collaboration. Conventional policy thinking places this issue in the hands of bureaucrats dealing with energy issues, but this specific venture must be integrated into a forward-looking foreign policy to reach out to millions.

The energy sector isn't the only place where American intellectual and financial investment can make a big difference. Reforming the current intellectual property regime is one area that can have a meaningful impact. Intellectual property rights have dominated trade negotiations for decades now. We fully endorse the rights of all inventors but at the same time would like to see more flexibility than provided in the current patent regime when it comes to inventions that, in addition to their economic value, have a significant social value. The Bush Administration and Congress can make gestures of generosity by easing intellectual property rights restrictions on items like brand name drugs so that cheaper generic drugs can be legally provided to save lives. This has been accomplished in limited ways with AIDS drugs. The success of that experiment, tells us that greater success can be found by expanding the model. Additionally, patents and copyrights for indigenous items like *basmati* rice and *neem* that have been part of everyday lives of communities in the developing world have bred hostility towards America. Such patents and copyrights must be discouraged. The process of granting them must be made more rigorous. We will make intellectual property rights a key part of our efforts this coming year.

Citizen's Participation

The voter turnout this past election was about 59%. Higher by about 5% compared to that in 2000. This is a positive trend and we hope we continue to see growth in the number of people who participate in their democracy through the electoral process. We not only want to see a rise in turnout but also want to see citizens more involved in the political debates of our times. Quantitative gains are encouraging but we need to ensure that the quality of citizen's participation improves as well. We want to see greater turnout in local elections as well. Democracy grows locally.

¹⁰ U.S. Small Business Administration from <http://www.sba.gov/advo/stats/sbfaq.html>



Youth participation in politics is an area of great interest for Young India. We are constantly pushing for greater youth participation in the political discourse. We feel that the youth has much more to offer than just volunteering. Today's youth is more informed than any generation that came before it, with more tools at hand to research and organize politically. We are not just hoping to see greater youth participation but are actively working to make it happen. With only 48.7% of the eligible voters in the 18-29 age group voting this year¹¹ there is a lot more work that needs to be done.

One of the biggest hurdles to citizen's participation in any democracy is the non-responsiveness of the political system when citizens **do** make an effort. A host of reasons can be identified for failure to affect policy, but one main reason is strategy. Citizens want to organize on many different issues but lack the technical and strategic know-how to either start, or, if started, to sustain their efforts. Young India plans to address that very question both in India as well as the United States. We have already placed a roadmap for effective nonviolent organizing on our website. The Nonviolence Direct Action chart found at <http://www.yidream.org/nvda.shtml> has been the most downloaded document off our website and we plan to disseminate it to larger audiences. Your support in this venture will be most appreciated. Citizens like us need to take these strategic steps and turn them into action. Help us by giving your time to your local efforts and financial assistance to us to spread this message (details at the end of the bulletin).

¹¹ CIRCLE analysis of 2004 Election results found at <http://www.civicyouth.org>



INDO-U.S. RELATIONS

Two of the most prominent democracies in the world face similar challenges. These challenges go well beyond the traditional security paradigm that has defined their relationship. During the Cold War years it was a triangulation with the Soviet Union as a third vertex of the security configuration. Not that Pakistan is equivalent to the Soviet Union, but today the Soviet Union has been replaced by Pakistan in this triangulated configuration. A close relationship between India and the United States is in the interest of both peoples. India represents an emerging economic power and established moral presence on the international scene. The United States is the most dominant economic power and is seeking to re-establish its moral presence. To further their own causes and those of the rest of the human family it is essential that these two nations collaborate in new ways.

As we have mentioned earlier we feel that economic collaboration with a focus on small businesses is a great way to truly benefit the maximum number of people in both countries. Going beyond the bilateral frontier the United States (a member of the G-7) must work with India (a member of the G-20) at multilateral institutions like the WTO and the UN to push forward a progressive agenda for sustainable economic growth. Too often, trade negotiations focus on the needs of large-scale industries and entrepreneurs with clout. Now is the time that a concerted effort to inspire entrepreneurship in the economically depressed regions of the world should be made a priority. In this age of information and technology there is no excuse not to disseminate the tools that will empower the weakest amongst us.

The scientific challenges that we alluded to should be jointly tackled. India and the United States are home to some of the finest scientific minds and institutions. Effective collaboration is imperative to not only to push the limits of exploration but also dream and develop technologies that can benefit society. It comes down to empowerment. Mahatma Gandhi once said that science without humanity is a sin. We believe in the spirit of that statement and feel that small, but meaningful innovations can make a big difference.

India is an ancient melting pot of world cultures. America is a much more modern version. India has faced many of the same challenges as America currently faces at home and abroad such as social assimilation, ethnic tension and even the rise and fall of fundamentalisms. We believe that America can learn a lot from India's experiences. America can also learn from India's response to violence. It has had its failures, but these failures have also taught policy-makers to adjust to new realities, leading to the evolution of new positions on Kashmir and the North-East states. India has not shied away from defending itself, but at the same time it has been proactive towards peace and reactive towards war. America must not commit the folly of doing the reverse. America has so much to offer India and the rest of the world that it saddens us to see its world image diminishing today. We, however, have full faith in the leaders of the United States to reclaim the respect that truly inspires millions across the globe. President Bush must continue his enthusiastic foray into better relations with India.



THE “DEBATE FOR DEMOCRACY” CONTINUES

The sacred institution of democracy took yet another step forward this year. The two general elections of India and the United States reaffirmed a large percentage of the world population's faith in the democratic process. Many more nations across the globe from Australia to Afghanistan to Uruguay and Ukraine contributed to the growth and sustenance of representative government. As we move forward we hope that our discussions will move away from the ***lack*** of democracy to the ***quality*** of democracy everywhere. And that is why the debate for democracy will continue.

Young India has increased its involvement in the Indian and American political spheres over this past year. We have seen the workings of Indian policy-making at the highest levels just as we have had the privilege to work with Congressional leaders in the United States. We have enhanced our understanding of the forces that affect the political climate. The winds of democracy constantly set new courses making us adjust to new realities. Our experiences have validated our theory that culture guides democracy that in turn dictates politics. The elections held this past year have given us a glimpse of the cultures that have invested themselves in democracy. The results indicate cultural trends that will continue to shape politics locally and globally.

The ideals laid out in the Common Minimum Program that has been declared as the collective mission of the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance impressed us. We feel a more people-centric reorientation of Indian policy-making was in order. It remains to be seen how the common citizens of India eventually benefit from this change that they have mandated. We will continue to stress the need for political decentralization through the strengthening of *Panchayati Raj*. We feel that village self-government, if given the tools to act out its mandates can significantly improve the lives of millions of Indians. It will make citizens true stakeholders in India's future – a central theme of India's movement for independence.

Progressive forces in India have a long way to go. The election of 2004 was more of a rejection of right-of-center politics than it was a welcome to the Congress party and its current allies. Yet the rejection was decisive and thus places a serious political responsibility on the Congress and its allies to provide the political system a real ideological and policy alternative. We also hope that the right-of-center forces will stay in the game and come back retooled with new ideas to inspire and empower the people of India - ***all*** of its citizens without discriminating on the basis of religion, caste or gender.

Our hopes are no different for America. We feel that, just like India, America too is at an ideological crossroads. The Republican Party is constantly moving farther right-of-center and, as electoral results indicate, is gaining political ground. The Democrats on the other hand have not been as successful as their progressive counterparts in the Indian National Congress, who were able to highlight the inadequacy of a right-wing incumbent. More so, the Republican Party has played with a better game plan than the right-wing BJP in India.

The Republicans have been lucky to have a charismatic leader like George W. Bush and a fine strategic mind like Karl Rove. This duo has been able to adapt to new political realities faster than their opponents and have been disciplined in pushing their foundational beliefs. The BJP was far more opportunistic in its approach in 2004 by pushing too hard on their economic "successes" (the "India Shining" campaign) that looked great on paper, but according to the masses didn't translate into change for them. It took its right-wing base for granted and didn't overtly push social issues that had in the past fetched it votes. It can also be argued that the BJP's right-wing base was overestimated by party strategists and, in the end, economic issues held sway. The Republicans didn't take that chance. Karl Rove had announced many months before the election that he was going to ensure a significantly larger turnout of Christian evangelicals this time. He was successful in doing that, blunting to a good degree the massive voter registration effort that the Democrats and other supporting grassroots organizations had undertaken. As pointed out earlier, Christian evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for George W. Bush. We feel that the BJP's social agenda in the past has bordered on sectarianism or at least inspired those feelings amongst



its supporters. So de-emphasizing their social agenda, either because of their belief in their economic record or bowing to coalition political pressures was a step in the right direction. But as we have now seen soon after their defeat at their National Executive meeting held in Mumbai, they decided to suspend their recent moderate forays and got back on the track of “cultural nationalism”. It remains to be seen how inclusive and moderate their “nationalism” is. We hope it includes all Indians as equals. The BJP is needed as part of the political discourse and we feel that it will be a better contributor if it can steer its party platform more forcefully away from the politics of religion. We sincerely hope that it can.

The Democrats have not responded to the grassroots movement that inspired the Republican turn out. Their national image has been called into question on issues of security. This is a fact reflected in exit poll data found in the first section of this document. Our readers are instructed to conduct their own research to determine the validity of the contributing charges. Their counterparts in the Indian National Congress on the other hand worked at the grassroots in a way that went undetected by most of the Indian media. They connected with the people through their problems under the rule of the BJP and their coalition partners. The Congress Party’s efforts were greatly assisted by a new breed of grassroots NGO’s that have become a significant part of India’s national discourse. It is difficult to apportion credit appropriately to the disenchantment with the BJP or the Congress’ ability to channel that discontent into an electoral victory. But in the end the Congress and its allies won while the BJP-led coalition lost.

As this debate for democracy continues we have much optimism about the coming years. As stated in this analysis, there is much work to be done, but despite several years of divergence and hostility towards the Bush Administration, we believe the world has much to look forward to. We indeed hope this Administration takes the lead and becomes consequential in the most positive ways possible. Our hopes depend on the actions and policy pronouncements of the President and his advisers. Many feel that our optimism is more wishful than pragmatic. We feel that when we lose optimism, we to some degree give up on making things better. This doesn’t mean that we won’t resist the Bush administration when we feel they are wrong – we will. Our goal, however, keeping with the principles of Gandhian nonviolence is to work with our supporters as well as our critics.

Over the coming year, Young India will focus on several policy areas to enhance ties between the United States and India. Enhancing transnational ties cannot end simply at more frequent meetings between the leadership or representatives of India and the United States. Our policy proposals aim to benefit the citizens of each country in specific, meaningful ways, taking the best of both worlds and improving the lives of people across various economic and social groups. This requires not just the involvement of policy-makers and politicians. It requires input from every direction, from activists to business owners to citizens like us. We look forward to bringing you these policy proposals.

Our fundamental goal remains that all political parties in all democracies develop a vision that focuses on strengthening communities and individuals by political and economically empowering them. The parties must ensure that social hurdles to such empowerment are duly addressed. Civil rights have to be the centerpiece of all political undertakings. And once we fuse such a political system with a citizenry that values its democratic responsibility, we will begin to march towards the greatness that democracy has in store for us. We conclude by sharing our belief in the goodness of hardworking men and women on whose sweat and blood great nations have been built and hope that their concerns and their challenges will continue to be the focus our political work.

We look to you, our readers, for support and assistance in reaching our goals. For information about how you can help, please contact us at:

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