

THE BATTLE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

As Indo-US engagement deepens, New Delhi is also increasingly sensitive to the political developments within the United States. Understanding the internal dynamics in the US from an Indian perspective has become an urgent necessity for the Indian policy and business communities. The United States Studies Programme of the Observer Research Foundation hopes to meet this requirement. The *ORF Monitor* aims to provide a weekly assessment on the November elections to the White House. We welcome comments and suggestions on the Monitor.



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In this issue

- **Career Paths to the Presidency**
- **Challenges facing George W. Bush and John Kerry**
- **ORF US Monitor Update**
- **Poll Analysis**

Career Paths to the Presidency

By Cherian Samuel

Paragraph 5 of Article 2, Section 1 of the United States Constitution lays down the necessary qualifications for a candidate to the U.S. Presidency as follows: "No person except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States, at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the office of President; neither shall any person be eligible to that office who shall not have attained to the age of thirty five years, and been fourteen years a resident within the United States." Technically, that makes well over a hundred million U.S. citizens eligible for that office. Yet, a survey of past presidents would show that the pool is actually much smaller and those who have become President have a history of public service and have invariably been Vice Presidents, governors, senators, representatives, cabinet secretaries, generals, or judges before running for president.

Governors have been the most successful of the lot in the quest for the Presidency; a fact that might seem surprising given the fact that Senators and Representatives would have had a much higher profile in the national media as compared to a Governor from one of the fifty states. Political analysts put this down to the public's desire for a fresh face, as also the fact that legislators are often hard put to explain their voting record on many an issue that would strike a raw nerve in certain important voting blocs, of which there are many. Moreover, governors can tom-tom their successful tenures in the gubernatorial mansion as being adequate qualification for them to be pitched into the highest office, never mind the fact that there is a vast difference between governing a state (unless it's a state like California) and being the President. Legislators, on the other hand, have a somewhat negative perception, in the public eye, and are seen as quintessential politicians, more talkers and less doers. So, though many legislators have gone onto become President, only three

legislators have made the direct jump, as Sen. Kerry is attempting to do, from the legislature to the Presidency.

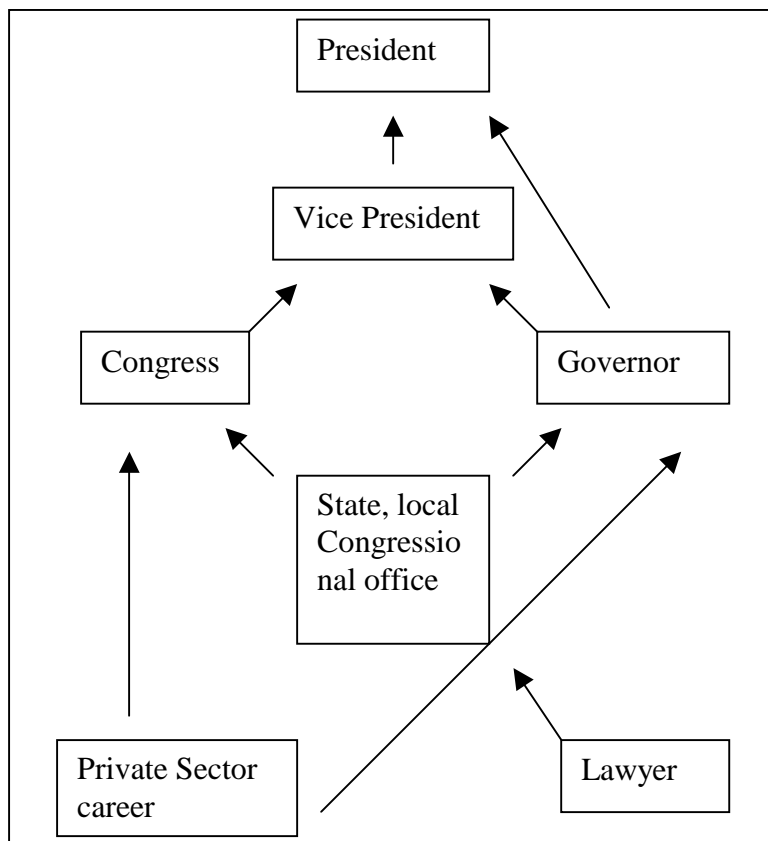
Last Position held by winners of Presidential races

Governors	18
Military leaders	10
Vice Presidents	8
Legislators	3

The preponderance of military leaders in the list is largely because in the early years, many American Presidents were Generals who had distinguished themselves in fields of battle, and shown themselves to be fine leaders. In the twentieth century, the last such military man who became president was Dwight D. Eisenhower, and though in recent times, former Generals such as Gen. Colin Powell and Gen. Wesley Clark have attempted to throw their hats in the ring, their attempts have come a cropper.

Looking at the educational backgrounds of past Presidents, there are an inordinately large number of lawyers, with twenty six of the past Presidents having law degrees. This is again, something the candidates don't highlight since the public holds lawyers also in equally low esteem. (One reason why John Edward's trial lawyer background is brought up over and over again) A recent Gallup poll found only 16 percent of the public ranked lawyers' ethics as high; among professions, lawyers were toward the bottom along with journalists and members of Congress.

Paths to the Presidency



The “natural born citizen” clause has come in the way of many a suitable candidate attempting to run for the office of the President. The general belief is that this clause was inserted as a result of strong rumours floating around that some members of the Constitutional Convention “were concocting a monarchical form of government and planning to invite Prince Frederick Augustus, the second son of George III, to accept an American crown.” Many attempts have been made to nullify this clause subsequently , especially when it comes in the way of a popular candidate but the lengthy procedure for a constitutional amendment have brought these campaigns to a grinding halt. (Congressional records show that since 1864, no less than 26 attempts have been made) After the last such attempt in the 1970s in order to pave the way for Henry Kissinger to run for President , there is an attempt currently under way, some say, to enable California Governor Arnold Shwarzenegger to take a shot at the Presidency. (As per that proposal initiated by Sen. Orin Hatch, the Constitution would be amended to allow a naturalized citizen who had been so for a period of twenty years to be eligible for the White House). Whether this succeeds where all the other attempts have failed remains to be seen.

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President	Major Jobs Before the Presidency
George Washington	surveyor, planter, general of the Army of the United Colonies
John Adams	schoolteacher, lawyer, diplomat, vice president under Washington
Thomas Jefferson	writer, inventor, lawyer, architect, governor of Virginia, secretary of state under Washington, vice president under Adams
James Madison	lawyer, political theorist, U.S. congressman, secretary of state under Jefferson
James Monroe	soldier, lawyer, U.S. senator, governor of Virginia
John Quincy Adams	lawyer, diplomat, professor, U.S. senator, secretary of state under Monroe
Andrew Jackson	soldier, U.S. congressman, U.S. senator, governor of Florida
Martin Van Buren	lawyer, U.S. senator, governor of New York, vice president under Jackson
James Buchanan	lawyer, U.S. congressman, U.S. senator, U.S. secretary of state
Abraham Lincoln	postmaster, lawyer, U.S. congressman from Illinois
Andrew Johnson	tailor, U.S. congressman, governor of Tennessee, U.S. senator from Tennessee, vice president under Lincoln
Ulysses S. Grant	U.S. Army general
Grover Cleveland	sheriff, lawyer, mayor, governor of New York

Benjamin Harrison	lawyer, soldier, journalist, U.S. senator from Indiana
William McKinley	soldier, lawyer, U.S. congressman, governor of Ohio
Theodore Roosevelt	rancher, soldier, governor of New York, vice president under McKinley
William Howard Taft	lawyer, judge, dean of the University of Cincinnati Law School, U.S. secretary of war
Woodrow Wilson	lawyer, professor, president of Princeton University, governor of New Jersey
Warren Harding	newspaper editor, U.S. senator from Ohio
Calvin Coolidge	lawyer, governor of Massachusetts, vice president under Harding
Herbert Hoover	engineer, U.S. secretary of commerce
Franklin D Roosevelt	lawyer, governor of New York
Harry S. Truman	farmer, soldier, haberdasher, judge, U.S. senator, vice president under Roosevelt
Dwight D Eisenhower	supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe, U.S. Army chief of staff
John F. Kennedy	journalist, U.S. congressman, U.S. senator from Massachusetts
Lyndon Baines Johnson	schoolteacher, soldier, congressman, U.S. senator from Texas, vice president under Kennedy
Richard Milhous Nixon	lawyer, U.S. congressman, U.S. senator, vice president under Eisenhower
Gerald Rudolph Ford	lawyer, U.S. congressman, vice president under Nixon
Jimmy Carter.	peanut farmer, governor of Georgia
Ronald Reagan	movie actor, corporate spokesman, governor of California
George H.W. Bush	oil executive, U.S. congressman, U.S. ambassador to the UN, Director of CIA, vice president under Reagan
Bill Clinton	lawyer, governor of Arkansas
George Walker Bush	oil executive, sport team owner, governor of Texas

U.S. Presidential Elections 2004: Challenges facing George W. Bush and John Kerry

Prof. Stephen Farnsworth

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(Summary of a talk held at ORF on 12 October 2004)

Prof. Farnsworth gave his talk in two parts. First, he addressed the issues relating to the media, drawing upon his findings in his recently published book, "The Nightly News Nightmare: Network Television's Coverage of U.S. Presidential Elections, 1988-2000" to illustrate his talk. According to him, in the first instance, the declining coverage of the Presidential campaign on national network television sent out the message that the campaign was not so important any more. Secondly, whatever coverage that remained was increasingly of the horse race variety, focusing on candidates and poll data, rather than the issues. Prof. Farnsworth illustrated this with an example from the 2000 presidential campaign where in the 2 months leading up to the election, there were 10 stories on foreign policy issues on the three networks. In contrast, in the final week of that campaign, when there was a revelation that George W. Bush had been arrested for drunk driving twenty-four years ago, that resulted in sixteen stories on that arrest. This contrast was all the more ironic considering that foreign policy issues have dominated George Bush's term in office, and yet when they elected him the first time, Americans had very little knowledge of his take on foreign policy issues. This represents a significant problem for voters when it comes to evaluating the candidates on issues.

Television has also forced the candidates to speak in sound-bites dictated by their perception of the attention span of the viewer. In 1968, the average length of a sound-bite was 42 seconds, in the year 2000, that had reduced to 7.8 seconds. Candidates have to come up with sentences that are simple, peppy and address trivial issues because there is no way a candidate can explain how he will tackle a problem like healthcare with a sentence that can run no more than eight seconds. In the television news business, there is also an increasing preference to let "talking heads" comprising journalists, anchors and political analysts to dominate discussion, as exemplified by another content analysis survey done by Prof. Farnsworth which showed that in an average story that went out over network television, 74 percent of the words were spoken by journalists, 14 percent by political analysts and only 12 percent by the candidates themselves. The above three factors combined lead to a belittling of politics and a trivialization of discourse.

A fourth issue that is often mentioned in a discussion of the Press is that of bias; the news organizations are perceived to be left of center, and that is supposed to be reflected in their coverage of the candidates and the campaign. However, an analysis of the coverage of the 2000 elections showed that while 60 percent of the coverage of the Gore campaign was negative, the figure for the Bush campaign was only slightly more at 63 percent.

Looking to the future, Prof. Farnsworth felt that the fragmentation of the media would effectively put an end to the "national conversation" that was carried out over network television, as people increasingly turned to other sources of news such as the Internet and cable news. This was not necessarily a bad thing, since these news dissemination sources provided more substantial coverage and analysis of issues.

Looking at the current elections, Prof. Farnsworth was of the opinion that this would be a replay of the 2000 elections with a verdict from one of the swing states, deciding who would be the next president of the United States. On the issue of Iraq, Prof. Farnsworth felt that the American people had generally accepted the argument that the world was better off without Saddam Hussein and that there was a significant number of people who felt that there was a link between Iraq and Osama bin Laden. The only sticking point was over who had the better plan from this point forward.

Kerry does better in people's perception on domestic policy, especially on the question on who will take the economy forward and create new jobs. It doesn't help Bush that he is the first President in 70 years to lose jobs under his watch. This, despite the President's plea that it's not all his fault; he inherited a Recession and this was exacerbated by 9/11. Job less is a major factor in these elections with 77 percent of those polled feeling that steps should be taken to prevent jobs from going overseas.

When it comes to the individual candidates themselves, Bush has won hands down on the likeability and reliability factors. This might seem like a trivial factor, but in the absence of adequate coverage of issues, people end up looking for clues about character. Bush has the advantage here because he is the incumbent President.

All this boils down to the fact that this is a dead heat election.

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ORF US Monitor Update

The Monitor has covered a variety of issues since March. Below are updates to some of those issues as they have played out over the course of the 2004 Presidential campaign.

Ralph Nader was covered in the very [first issue](#) of the Monitor and in a subsequent issue that carried an article on Arab Americans.

In an article dated 15 October 2004 titled [Nader Emerging as the Threat Democrats Feared](#), the *New York Times* newspaper reports that Nader has the potential to tip the balance in nine states where Pres. Bush and Sen. Kerry are running neck and neck. Despite efforts and lawsuits by the Democrats to have him struck off the ballot, Nader remains on the ballot in 30 states. In a story on 16 October 2004 titled [Bush Lawyer Anticipates Delay in Tally](#), the *Washington Post* newspaper reports on Republican suspicions that late lawsuits by Democrats contesting Ralph Nader's candidature is a ploy to disenfranchise the military since it would be too late to mail out military ballots after these suits are settled.

In an article dated 4 October 2004, the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper carries an article titled [Arabs in Florida Angered by Bush](#) which looks at the way the Arab vote is likely to go in this key swing state. The state has close to a hundred thousand Arab American voters, many of whom voted for Nader the last time around because of his Arab lineage. The main candidates have to walk a tight-rope because the state also has a substantial Jewish population. According to the paper, a recent July survey showed that just 30 percent of the state's Arab Americans planned to back Bush and 48 percent favored Kerry. Thirteen percent supported Nader, who recently won a court battle to appear on the Florida ballot.

Abortion was covered in the [fourteenth issue](#) of the Monitor. Recent articles in the mainstream American newspapers have focused on the ability of President Bush to incorporate subliminal messages in his speeches reassuring his core constituency of Christian evangelicals of where he stands on issues such as abortion while appearing to be seemingly ambiguous on these issues, on the surface. Related links include [Openly Religious, to a Point](#) , article in the *Washington Post* dated 15 September 2004 and [Abortion Foes Call Bush's Dred Scott Reference Perfectly Clear](#) , article in the *Los Angeles Times* dated 13 October 2004.

The dilemma facing the **gay community** was also highlighted in [Issue 14](#) of the Monitor. Matters finally came to a head in September and the national board of the Log Cabin Republicans voted 22-2 to withhold endorsement of President Bush in his re-election effort. An estimated one million gays had voted for Bush in 2000 and pollsters believe that the President's backing of a Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage could cost him gay votes in several battleground states. More on this in the following *Los Angeles Times* article dated 8 September 2004 [Gay GOP Group Won't Endorse Bush Reelection](#)

[Issue 12](#) carried an article on the **Democrats and the Indian American Community** while [Issue 13](#) looked at the **Republican wooing of the Indian American community**. That continued through the ethnic Indian press: *India Abroad* newspaper carried an [interview with President Bush](#) on September 1 followed by one with [challenger John Kerry](#) on October 12

[Issue 4](#) carried an article on how to make sense of the **Electoral College**. Now, from Colorado comes the news that voters are going to decide on whether to switch to a system of apportioning electoral college votes based on a system of proportional representation rather than the first-past-the-post system as exists now. Ronald Brownstein, columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, explains how [Making Every Vote Count Would Be a Tricky Proposition](#)

Our [most recent issue](#) carried an article on how difficult it is for the average citizen to interpret **poll findings**. That and the problems faced by pollsters, is the subject of two articles in the New York Times ([Bush Leads. Make That Kerry. Why Can't the Pollsters Agree?](#))and Los Angeles Times ([Pollsters Can't Just Phone It In](#)) respectively.

[Issue 18](#) looked at the issue of **Social Security** as a factor in the Presidential elections and pondered why it wasn't given the priority it deserved given the looming crisis predicted by economists. The *Washington Post* newspaper had a stinging editorial on the subject in its issue dated October 14 post the Debates. Click here for [Debate Ducking](#)

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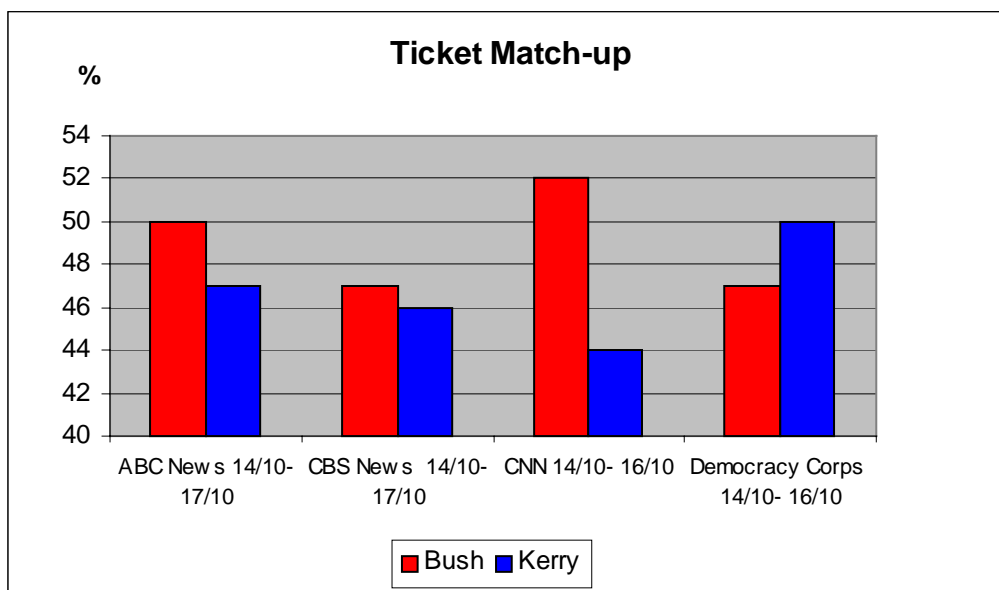
Poll Analysis: It's a dead heat

The latest poll figures have come in, and there are no surprises there. The elections have basically become a dead heat, and that state of affairs seems set to continue till election day, barring surprises. The poll responses seemed to be dictated largely by the personalities of the candidates, with likeability and reliability being the yardstick by which voters seemed to have decided which way their vote would go. The candidates also seemed to have it in their mind to evoke such strong feelings among the voters, if Kerry's using the "I" word and referring to the Cheneys' daughter as an example of a lesbian who should be allowed to make her own choices, was

anything to go by. The reference drew a wave of protests from the Cheneys' and the Republicans and much newsprint has gone into debating the issue. It could also be that in a country whose citizens have so much to distract them, this is the only way to make them pay attention to the elections. The third of the Presidential debates was the last opportunity, especially for Candidate Kerry, to make an impression on the voters. Interest among the voters was evident from the fact that despite two baseball play-off games, the third presidential debate drew more than fifty million viewers, more than watched any of the Presidential debates in 2000 or 1996, according to the *New York Times* newspaper.

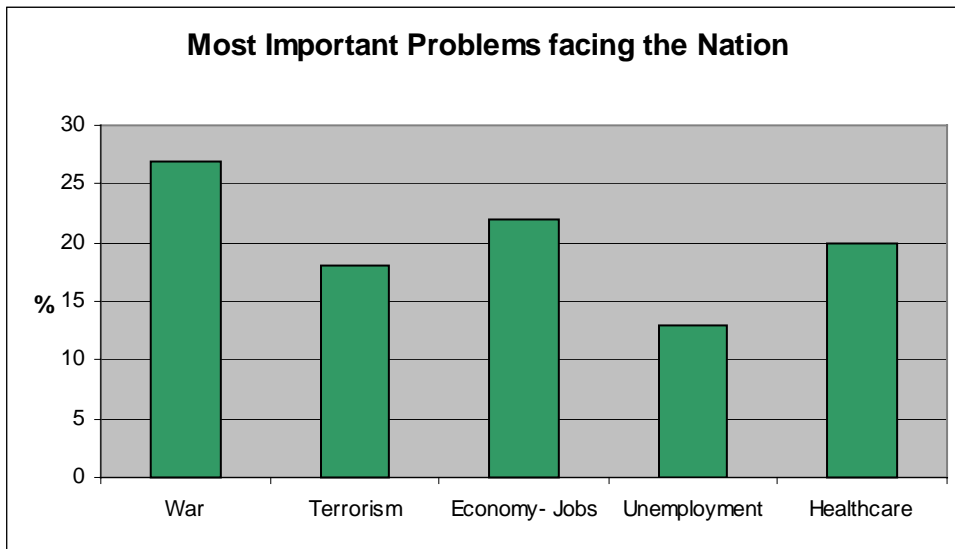
Polls immediately following the debates generally favoured Kerry. In the first instant poll from ABC News, 42 percent said Kerry had won, 41 percent felt Bush had pulled off the impossible and 14 percent said neither. The other news networks were also quick to come out with their figures. In a CBS news poll, 39 percent said Kerry was the winner, while only 25 percent said Bush had won. A CNN poll gave victory in the debate to Kerry, 52 percent to 39 percent.

However, as the week went by, the numbers began to come back to their old levels. Most polling organizations have also shifted over to tracking polls, ie, polling on a daily basis. Those polls show the two candidates in a dead heat.



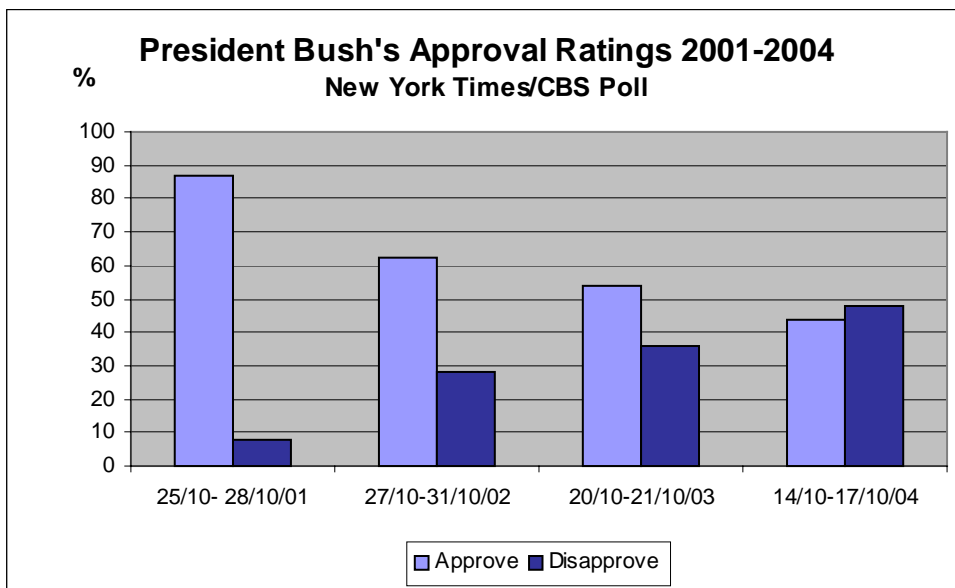
However, polling on the issues showed that the messages sent out by each candidate on his challenger in the debate had hit home (remember 95 percent of the containers that come into our ports are not checked...); for instance 59 percent of those polled in a *New York Times* poll said they believed that President Bush favoured corporate interests. In general, respondents favoured Bush on foreign policy issues while Kerry came up trumps on domestic issues. So, all would depend on what would be top of the mind when the voter traipses into the polling booth on November 2nd.

The pollsters were out to find that out as well; in an AP-Ipsos poll, respondents were asked to identify the most important issues facing the United States. 55 percent picked national security issues, up from 44 percent in April.



AP/Ipsos Poll

President Bush's job ratings are also none too encouraging; at 44 percent as per a New York Times Poll, they are still above the 39 percent approval rating the senior Bush had when he stood for election, but precipitously low for an incumbent President seeking re-election. A survey of approval ratings from 2001-2004 brings out the decline starkly.



EDITORIAL TEAM: Dr C. Raja Mohan, Cherian Samuel, Ashok Sharma and Avanti Bhati

Readers Comments: ORF would like to thank the recipients of the US Election Monitor for the number of encouraging responses that they have sent to the past seventeen issues. We value our readers and their opinions and we invite them to

write in on issues and arguments, carried in the Monitor, or simply send us their comments.

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We appreciate your support and your patience in our endeavours.