

Watching the American polls, one debate at a time

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We cannot say for sure what the future holds, as we prepare for the next couple of months to decide the fate of this messy economy that is in the hands of leaders with bureaucrats who are hated by the Republican vote bank and an autocratic leader with the impulse control of a toddler.



Republican presidential candidate and former president, Donald Trump, and Republican vice presidential candidate Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, with their families at the Republican National Convention, July 18, 2024, in Milwaukee. AP/PTI

Sitting in the US, in my apartment, I saw the live debate between US presidential candidates Joe Biden and Donald J Trump. Biden's performance was unimpressive. I was expecting the debate to be more animated since it included Trump. I remember his past presidential debate with Hillary Clinton in 2016. I was in Chicago, visiting a Telugu Dalit family of business folks. The hosts, who favoured the woman candidate, saw Clinton being ripped to shreds by Trump's scathing attacks.

As he attacked, it was clear that he was not going to play by the rulebook. He presented himself as the captain of the boys' club who treated anything that challenged his whimsical views as an affront.

Though he began his speech on July 18 – his first since surviving an assassination attempt on July 13 – by striking an unusually conciliatory tone amidst calls for national unity, he quickly veered towards familiar territory by raising the bogey of “invasion” from the southern border and talking of how Biden would usher in World War III. Thus, so far, it’s the same ol’ Donald vs the same ol’ Joe.

The architect of Trumpian appeal is former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon, who noticed a striking gap in the conduct of American politics, which he identified as “elite” and “alienated”. He was later thrown out by Trump from his administration. Bannon was recently interviewed by New York Times columnist David Brooks. Bannon introduced his movement as the “Army of the Awakened” who are trained online and go after the elites on social media. Bannon has also created the nationalist appeal of America First. While almost every country in the world prioritises its own citizens, one thing that America does fantastically is to merge the global image of self-sustenance with local resources.

Bannon holds the view that the visa regime is exploited by foreign students, particularly those from India and China. Besides wanting them to return within a couple of weeks after completing their coursework, he wants to reduce foreign student intake by 50%. He pitted this against the lack of representations of Black and Hispanic groups. He is sensational but shortsighted. When the David Cameron-led UK government tried to restrict foreign student access, the burgeoning middle class in developing countries sent their pupils to the US, Canada and Australia, instead.

Liberal White friends from Massachusetts came over for dinner. One was an attorney, the other a professor. Both are retired and had houses in a plush neighbourhood in Greater Boston. They hated Trump’s guts and his unflattering remarks on various groups they considered needed protection. They said that no matter Biden’s performance — they thought of him as “incapable” in his current state — they swore they wouldn’t switch to the Republican side.

After the debate, a senior journalist living in the Boston area told me that he was concerned about Biden but cautioned against playing too much into Trumpian attacks. Still, the journalist was consistent in his support as an “anti-Trump candidate”. Ever since the debate three weeks ago, a lot has changed. All of a sudden, Biden’s promise to lead a second term is being met with suspicion. Even the donor class of the Democrats has started questioning his ability to win. His strongest supporters, former President [Barack Obama](#) and ex-Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who would pop up in YouTube ads daily asking for a donation of \$5, have urged him not to run again.

Ironically, his rival Bernie Sanders endorsed him in an op-ed in the New York Times. While the endorsement was like a lifeline for the Biden poll panel, one can certainly reckon that he himself is ready to call it quits. Two candidates could win the baton — Vice-President, [Kamala Harris](#), and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. We cannot say for sure what the future holds, as we prepare for the next couple of months to decide the fate of this messy economy that is in the hands of leaders with bureaucrats who are hated by the Republican vote bank and an autocratic leader with the impulse control of a toddler.

But I am not going to think about it, as I am currently in Kenya. The tribal caste groups here and their animosity over caste nepotism held by President Ruto is being challenged by Gen-Z. We should see what happens here.

