

THE BATTLE FOR THE WHITE HOUSE

As Indo-U.S. engagement deepens, it is also increasingly sensitive to the political developments within the United States. Understanding the internal dynamics in the U.S. from an Indian perspective has become an urgent necessity for the Indian policy and business community. 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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SPECIAL

The Indian-American Diaspora: Small fish in a big sea?

By Amit Gupta

Analysts both in the United States and India view the growing political mobilization of the Indian-American community, positively. In the United States, Indian-Americans are seen as an educated, technologically savvy, and wealthy minority that not only has a growing political influence but could also attain a bargaining power comparable to that of the American Jewish community. In India, the Indian-American community is now viewed as helping further Indian foreign policy and security goals as well help in the economic development of India.

While the Indian-American diaspora's progress and political mobilization have been commendable, both these positions about the community's political power are overstated. The Indian diaspora's role as a facilitator of foreign policy will require a greater commitment from the Indian government to both develop stronger ties with the Indian-American community and provide greater incentives to it. Further, the best lobbying efforts cannot work if there is a fundamental divergence of political views between the United States and India—as was the case when the Indian Parliament unanimously condemned the 2003 American led war in Iraq.

Background: The Indian-American Community

The Indian American community is considered a model community and one that has grown rapidly in the last decade. It now numbers approximately 1.7 million people, and the following characteristics provide it with impressive credentials:

- A median income of \$60,093 that is double the median income of all American families.
- 200,000 Indian-Americans are millionaires.
- 58% of Indian-Americans over the age of 25 have a college degree.
- 15% of Silicon Valley start-up firms are owned by Indian-Americans
- More than 5000 Indian-Americans on the faculties of American universities.
- And 74,603 Indians are studying in the United States—making Indians the largest number of foreign students in the country.

Till recently, however, Indian-Americans were an almost invisible community. It had not assimilated as much as succeeded and disappeared into American society. It was a community with a low political profile and its cultural impact on the United States was low. An additional part of the problem was that the Indians in America had (and continue to have) a weak sense of national identity choosing to identify with their different regional, linguistic, and religious groupings.

Coupled with this phenomenon is the problem of a “cultural freeze.” This is a situation where immigrants retain the traditions, culture, and values of their home country even though they may have been significantly modified in their country of origin. The second major wave of Indian immigrants came in the 1960s and once in the United States froze part of its culture and attitudes. Cultural freezes may not be conducive to the modern national identity that India projects. The emphasis on caste and religion among the diaspora, works against modern India’s portrayal of itself as a secular state as well as against ongoing trends in Indian society.

Causes for Political Mobilization

For several reasons, however, the community has become more politically active. It has reached critical mass with a concentrated population in certain major metropolitan areas—the community’s population also doubled from 1990 to 2000 to reach approximately 1.7 million. Further, the community is prosperous and can potentially, therefore, organize fairly effectively.

Second, it is digitally connected both within the United States and to the home nation. Third, in the past decade, a new generation of Indian-Americans has attained political maturity. They have organized, are politically savvy, understand the process in Washington, and have a range of interests that they seek to promote. Fourth, a portion of the Indian diaspora now comprises of the siblings of the Indian elite. Increasingly, Indian businessmen, bureaucrats, military personnel, and to a lesser extent, politicians, have their children studying or living in the United States. This elite group has the ability to reach the most relevant sectors of Indian decision making with their complaints and concerns.

Lastly, two major events have worked to raise political consciousness and mobilize the diaspora. The first event was India’s 1998 decision to test nuclear weapons. The second was the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001.

The tests were followed by an automatic imposition of economic and military sanctions by the United States government. Consequently, Indian groups worked actively to have these sanctions rolled back. Since then, the same groups have been active in attempting to increase U.S.-India cooperation, in helping forge a strategic relationship with Jewish groups in the United States, and in working to counter Pakistani lobbying efforts in the United States.

Of these, the link with Jewish groups is the most interesting since it is an attempt to piggyback on the lobbying skills of these groups to achieve certain political ends—most notably the sale of defense technologies like Israel's Phalcon airborne warning system and its Arrow anti-ballistic missile.

There has also been some discussion about a U.S.-India-Israel strategic relationship that is aimed at countering terrorism—especially that inspired by radical Islamic groups. The question remains, however, whether this a long-term phenomenon or a short-term tactical alliance based on common threat perceptions.

The other event that catalyzed Indian-American political action was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of 9/11, Indians in America were attacked (particularly Sikhs), according to one estimate 15,000 lost their jobs because of new federal regulations that airport security checkpoints be manned only by U.S. citizens, and there were the problems associated with profiling. Thus the invisible and prosperous Indian minority suddenly found that being wealthy and law abiding did not protect an individual from being profiled and discriminated against. The combination of these factors has created a belief both in the United States and in India that the American-Indian diaspora, along with its various lobbying and political action groups, will play a role for India similar to that of the Jewish community and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in its support for Israel. There are several reasons that this may be an overoptimistic assessment.

Constraints

First, as Krishna Kumar of the Indian-American Policy Institute argues, the Indian diaspora in the United States is miniscule and even if it doubles in the next decade to approximately 3.5 million it will still be numerically insignificant in a country of nearly 300 million people. Secondly, the Jewish community has been in the United States for a much longer period of time and, therefore, has a larger donor base for both political contributions and philanthropy.

Further, Indian-Americans remain, like most Asian Americans, fairly apolitical. As one political activist pointed out, during the 2002 elections only 10,000 of about 45,000 Indian-Americans living in Massachusetts were registered to vote. Moving Indians away from such political apathy will take time. Nor is the community geographically concentrated, as a part of the Jewish community is in New York or the Cuban community is in Miami, to have significant political influence in crucial electoral states.

The mobilizational capabilities of the community are also exaggerated as can be seen by the attempt to remove Representative Cynthia McKinney of Georgia from Congress. After Representative McKinney called for the Balkanization of India, Indian-American activist groups sought to unseat her. The attempt was successful but also underlined the limits of Indian-American ability to politically mobilize. According to Dr. Narsi Narasimhan of the Indian Professionals Network of Atlanta, one of the groups spearheading the effort, Indian-Americans probably donated about \$20,000 in the bid to dislodge the incumbent. It was only when out of state Jewish-American contributions started to pour in, however, that the financial tide turned significantly against Representative McKinney.

Thirdly, as Samuel Huntington has argued, for institutions to survive they must be able to weather a generational change. The question then arises, will the next generation of Indian-Americans have the same type of affinity with the home country

that their parents have? The answer is at best a mixed one and can be discerned by how young Indian-Americans define their identity. The terms they use include Indian-Americans, South Asian Americans, Hindu Americans, and Indian Muslim Americans to name a few. This suggests that the next generation may well break into disparate groups based on differing perceptions of identity.

Coupled with the general shift in identity is the shift in the attitude on the India-Pakistan issue. Young Indian-Americans policy activists have stated that as far as they were concerned, the rivalry between the South Asian neighbors was a dead issue. They were Americans with positive feelings for India but did not want, quite understandably, to be dragged into the nationalistic and religious rivalries of the subcontinent.

Finally, one needs to examine what the long-term economic stakes the Indian community has in the home country. The investments of the Indian diaspora from other countries are much higher than those of its constituents in the United States. Thus the approximately 3.6 million Indians working in the Persian Gulf countries have higher stakes in maintaining stronger ties with India and, since the mid-1970s, have provided significant hard currency earnings (more than half the NRI investments in India) to the Indian government.

Further, the role of the diaspora in terms of its contribution to Indian economic development has been exaggerated. Indian government documents point out that the best inflows of capital into a country are of Foreign Direct Investment—actual investments to develop industries in the country. The commitment of the Indian diaspora to FDI was low: in 2001-2002 it was only \$35 million out of a total FDI inflow of \$3.9 billion. Further, the bulk of the diaspora's money was in portfolio investments—where the investments are volatile and short-term—and in fixed deposit schemes that are fully convertible to hard currency

Nor can the Indian-American diaspora be viewed as a major supplier of technology. Most of the technologies that India needs would require Congressional approval and there is little that the Indian-American community could do to facilitate such transfers.

Finally, diaspora groups tend to support the home country as long as it fits into the interests of the host nation. When these interests diverge, the diaspora group tends to side with its country of domicile rather than its country of origin. The development of significantly better ties between India and the United States have come about not primarily because of the lobbying efforts of Indian-Americans but, instead, due to a changed political perception in both countries. Yet this improvement in the relationship could be derailed if the two countries foreign policy and security objectives start to significantly differ. Future U.S. proliferation concerns could also potentially hurt the relationship since Washington, in an ideal world, would like India to sign the NPT.

Thus it would be premature for the Indian government to expect that the diaspora will work to help further Indian goals in foreign, economic, and security policy over an extended period of time. What the Indian government needs to do, and the High Level Committee report on the Indian Diaspora addresses this, is to create the type of cultural, emotional, and economic links that will withstand the transition from a predominantly Indian born diaspora to an American born one.

Possible Policy Measures

In practical terms, the Indian government will have to create cultural and educational centers in the United States so that young Indians can learn about India and the current trends within Indian society. Further, a serious move to establish India chairs in universities around the United States will have to be attempted. Coupled with such efforts there has to be a set of programs that can take young members of the diaspora from all over the world to study abroad programs in India. Indian universities and think-tanks should be encouraged to create summer courses for American colleges that would permit young Indian-Americans to come to India, study about it and get to travel around the country.

There is also the need to attract retired Indians to come and contribute to the country's developmental efforts. This could be done in several ways. One could be to get diaspora donations to set up a technologically advanced university and staff it with retired or visiting faculty—this has already been done in Bangladesh with the creation of a North-South University. Another strategy may be to establish an Indian International Voluntary Scheme that permits members of the diaspora to come and contribute to national developmental efforts—an Indian style peace corps.

As far as technological development is concerned, the focus should be not on acquiring dual use technologies but instead, focusing on the technologies of peace. India continues to have severe energy problems and it would be useful to engage the Indian-American scientific community in developing alternative energy programs and technologies. Similarly, scientific programs that provide improved transportation capabilities as well as cheaper methods to carry out construction projects should be pursued. As part of this process the Indian government would be well served to develop a database of Indian-Americans and the skills that they can potentially contribute.

The other crucial area is making India genuinely investment friendly for the diaspora investor. Indian bureaucratic red tape and corruption have forced nonresident Indians to put their money in stocks and in savings accounts. Some of the recent proposals made by the new minister for NRI affairs, Mr. Jagdish Tytler, may be relevant—his suggestion that one ministry act to facilitate and clear investments nonresident Indians is worth considering. If the Indian government wants to tap into the overseas community's entrepreneurial skills it will have to create a favorable climate for investing in India. Then only will there be a genuine, long-term connection between India and its diaspora.

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Follow the Leader? AIPAC in its own words

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) has 65,000 members across all 50 states who are at the forefront of the most vexing issues facing Israel today: stopping Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, fighting terrorism and achieving peace. And above all, ensuring that Israel is strong enough to meet these challenges.

Through more than 2,000 meetings with members of Congress - at home and in Washington - AIPAC activists help pass more than 100 pro-Israel legislative initiatives a year. From procuring nearly \$3 billion in aid critical to Israel's security, to funding joint U.S.-Israeli efforts to build a defense against unconventional weapons, AIPAC members are involved in the most crucial issues facing Israel.

Activists work closely with AIPAC's professional staff, people drawn from the top echelons of government, diplomacy, academia and politics. AIPAC lobbyists meet every member of Congress and cover every hearing on Capitol Hill that touches on the U.S.-Israel relationship. AIPAC policy experts each day review hundreds of periodicals, journals, speeches and reports and meet regularly with the most innovative foreign policy thinkers in order to track and analyze events and trends.

Professionals in AIPAC's regional offices reach out to activists in hundreds of communities each year from Missoula, Montana, to Miami, Florida. Whether meeting in a neighbor's living room, attending a ballroom gala or participating in an AIPAC conference in Washington, AIPAC activists receive the most up-to-date analyses of Middle East issues and American politics.

For more than two decades, AIPAC's Political Leadership Development Program has educated and trained young leaders in pro-Israel advocacy, and encouraged them to become politically active. Students involved with AIPAC learn how to effectively advocate for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, bring their Members of Congress to campus, promote voter registration, work on political campaigns, and build relationships with other student leaders.

From the [AIPAC](#) website

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Fishing for votes in foreign lands

By Cherian Samuel

One indicator that both the Democratic and Republican camps are leaving no stone unturned in their race to the White House is the enthusiasm with which they have gone after the overseas vote. As per existing law, overseas American citizens over the age of 18 are entitled to have their absentee votes counted in the state where they last lived.

Although no official census has been taken of Americans abroad, an unofficial survey conducted by the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs in 1999 came out with an estimate of nearly 4 million American citizens living in 168 countries, with 75 % of that number living in 12 countries. Other estimates put the number at closer to 10 million.

U.S. citizens living abroad (excluding Government employees and their dependents)

| Country | U.S. Citizens |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mexico | 1,036,300 |
| 2. Canada | 687,300 |
| 3. United Kingdom | 224,000 |
| 4. Germany | 210,880 |
| 5. Italy | 168,967 |
| 6. France | 101,750 |
| 7. Australia | 100,300 |
| 8. Spain | 94,513 |
| 9. Israel | 94,195 |
| 10. Greece | 72,500 |
| 11. Japan | 70,350 |
| 12. China (inc Hong Kong) | 65,157 |
| Total | 2,966,852 |

The task of pulling in the vote of the overseas voter is easier said than done, since absentee balloting is a tedious three stage process with some states even requiring witnesses and notaries to sign the ballot. The detailed questionnaires and forms that one is required to fill in have also led to the widely prevalent notion that getting one to vote is an invidious attempt by the government to keep a tab on its citizens abroad, and worse still, to bring them within the tax net. (The United States is one of the few countries that taxes its citizens even if they are settled abroad.)

Democrats Abroad and its counterpart, Republicans Abroad are both organizational units set up by the parent parties to disabuse the voter of such misconceptions and to sufficiently enthuse them to cast their ballot. While the former has chapters in 60 countries (up from 30 in 2000), the latter is active in 50 countries. Democrats Abroad has also been granted the status of the 51st state for administrative purposes and can cast nine votes at the Democratic National Convention.

Though the candidates themselves haven't campaigned abroad, they have both sent emissaries to countries around the world to campaign on their behalf, with Mexico topping that list for obvious reasons. The star campaigner for President George W. Bush in Mexico is his nephew George P. Bush whose mother is Hispanic. That he has taken after his mother in the looks department even though he knows only limited Spanish wouldn't do anything to harm the president's cause. Though John Kerry is not so lucky with relatives, he does have a number of linguists in the family. While his wife Theresa used to work for the United Nations as a linguist and is fluent in five languages, it is his sister Diana Kerry (also a linguist and fluent in French and German) who has taken the lead in contacting overseas voters, taking campaign swings through Mexico, Canada and the European countries as part of her 100 city world tour to mobilize voters.

The one country from where President George W. Bush expects large numbers of votes coming his way is Israel. This might seem surprising given that within the United States, only 7% of Jews are registered as Republicans as against 70% Democrats. However, as analysts point out, once in Israel, Jewish voters are no

longer guided by a presidential candidate's position on domestic issues. Instead, they vote for whoever they think will serve Israel's interests.

Be that as it may, as one of the greatest shows on Earth, Election Campaign 2004 winds its way to November 2nd, the American Diaspora is also finally finding a place under the circus tent.

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Home Truths

"During the 2000 election, President George W. Bush carried the state of Florida by 537 votes from Republicans overseas thanks to a massive international advertising campaign and strong grassroots leadership on the part of Republicans Abroad. In addition, Republicans won two Senate seats and six seats in the U.S. House of Representatives because of Republican absentee ballots cast from overseas."

– From the homepage of [Republicans Abroad](#)

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The Republican Party Platform 2004

By Stuti Banerjee

- ❖ War on Terror – More than half of the ninety page document is devoted to national security and the war against terrorism. The platform emphasizes the need to confront terrorists and the nations that support them. The manifesto also supports increased intelligence gathering and proposes the establishment of a national counterterrorism center.

Excerpt: *"There is no negotiation with terrorists. No form of therapy or coercion will turn them from their murderous ways. Only total and complete destruction of terrorism will allow freedom to flourish."*

- ❖ Foreign Policy – The emphasis is on expanding free markets and spreading democracy. *"The United States must use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe — by actively working to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets and free trade to every corner of the world."*
- ❖ Gay Marriage – The platform takes an extreme position on the contentious issue of gay marriage which has rocked the country over the past year. It condemns not just gay marriage but also state recognition of other same-sex unions. In a related issue, the platform also reiterates its belief that homosexuals should not serve in the military.

Excerpt: *"The well-being of children is best accomplished in the environment of the home, nurtured by their mother and father, anchored by the bonds of marriage. Legal recognition and the accompanying benefits afforded couples should be preserved for that unique and special union of one man and one woman."*

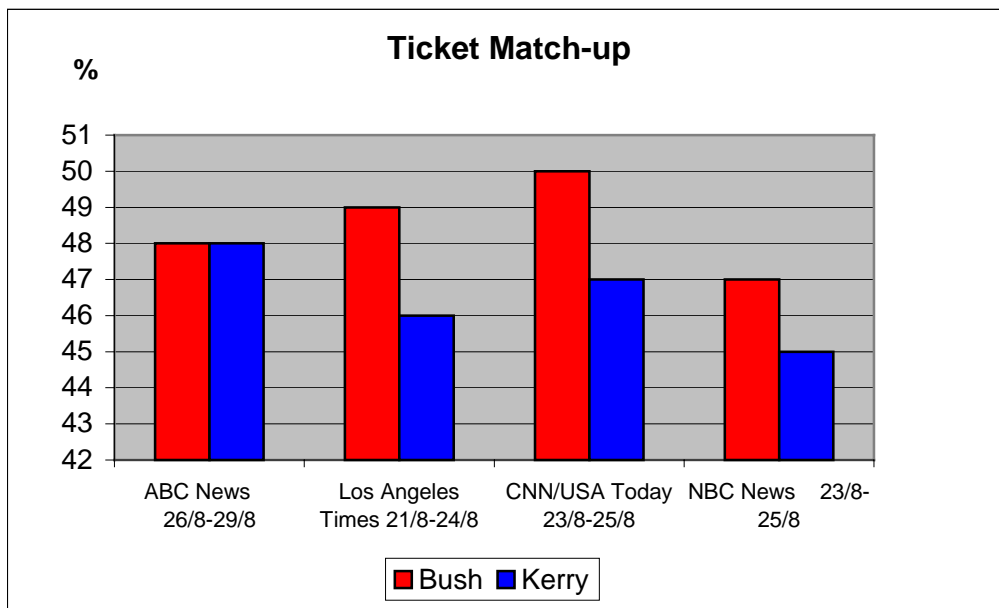
- ❖ Environment – In a move certain to enrage environmentalists and governments worldwide, the Platform places on record the Republican

Party's continued opposition to the Kyoto protocol regulating "greenhouse gases". It also supports President Bush's "Clear Skies" proposal, which is opposed by most environmentalists but strongly supported by the energy industry since it dilutes pollution standards considerably. To cap it all, the Platform lauds President Bush's initiative to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling. The philosophy behind these initiatives is encapsulated in the following phrase from the platform: *"Republicans know that economic prosperity is essential to environmental progress."*

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Poll Analysis: Bushwhacked!

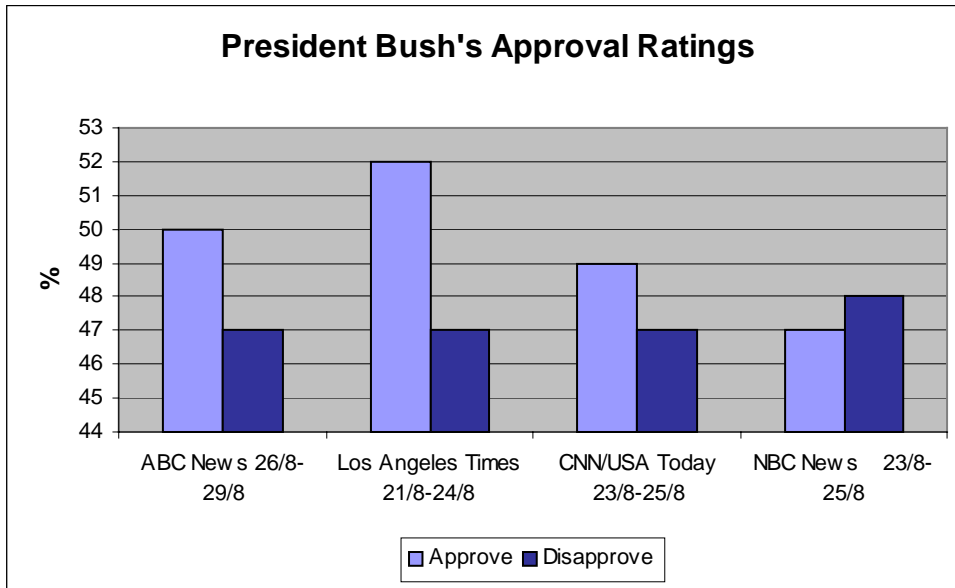
President Bush goes to the Republican National Convention with voters being favorable to him for the first time since July. What is more worrisome for the Democrats is that the President is leading in three important battleground states - Ohio, Wisconsin and Missouri. The intense media attention given to the ads attacking the Democrat nominees Vietnam record seems to have had an impact on the figures, even though most people polled believe that Kerry did serve honorably in the war. But the President also has cause to worry; most people polled said that the economic policies of the government have had a negative impact on the country.



The political epicenter seems to have shifted for the duration from the hustle and bustle of Washington D.C. to the two states of Florida and Ohio. With 27 electoral votes Florida is a state that both candidates cannot afford to lose. The latest surveys show that despite the hurricane that devastated the state, voters still have a viewpoint on the November elections.

Ohio seems to be the other battleground for both challenger and the incumbent. Both candidates have made numerous rounds of the state with their deputies in tow. As far as George W. Bush is concerned, he would do well to keep it in mind that no Republican from Lincoln to Bush has won the presidency without winning the state. The Democrats know that the state is winnable since it was won twice by Clinton only to be lost by Gore. The state has 20 electoral votes and according to the

CNN/USA Today/ Gallup poll Kerry has a slight lead with 50% of the registered voters supporting him as opposed to 41% who support Bush.



President Bush's approval ratings have also shown considerable improvement over the past week. An ABC-Washington Post poll that queried voters on several issues such as voter enthusiasm, personal popularity and ratings on such issues as education, the economy, Iraq and terrorism showed that Bush has gained on all these fronts. However, poll pundits also add a caveat in that the Olympic Games have taken the focus of the voter away from campaign issues momentarily. But with the expected "bump" from the Republican Convention this week, September promises to be a good month for Bush.

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Scenes from the Bumper Sticker War



From www.cafepress.com



From www.ekay.com

EDITORIAL TEAM: Dr C. Raja Mohan, Cherian Samuel, Stuti Banerjee 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 twelve issues. We value our readers and their opinions and are therefore glad to announce an interactive board called 'Readers Comments'. Our readers can write in on issues and arguments, carried in the monitor, or use the space to send us their comments.

Disclaimer: If you do not wish to receive this newsletter in the future, please do let us know by writing to cherians@orfonline.org.

We appreciate your support and your patience in our endeavours.