

**An International Conference**  
**on**  
***U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION 2016***

***August 29, 2016***

organised by

**CPPR – Centre for Strategic Studies**

in association with

**Sacred Heart College**

&

**South India American Studies Network – Kerala Chapter**

supported by

**U.S. Consulate General in Chennai**

Venue: Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Kochi, Kerala

The one-day International Conference on ‘U.S. Presidential Election 2016’, conceptualised and organised by the CPPR - Centre for Strategic Studies, Kochi in association with Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Kochi, and South India American Studies Network - Kerala Chapter with the support of the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai Region attempted to present an overview of the ongoing U.S. Presidential Election campaign by deliberating on the political parties and candidates in the fray, their policies and issues, and the impact of the positions taken by the Presidential candidates on multiple issues beyond borders.

To this end, it engaged experts on American politics and foreign policy for generating insights to help develop an in-depth understanding of the changes in the election process over the years and the country’s prospective foreign policy overtures.

## Speakers at the Conference

*Professor (Dr) G Gopakumar, Vice Chancellor, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod*

*T P Sreenivasan, Former Ambassador of India*

*Raymond E Vickery Jr, Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Commerce Trade Development*

*Dr Father Johnson X Palackappillil CMI, Principal, Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Kochi*

*Professor K C Abraham, Academic Director, Centre for Public Policy Research*

*Professor Rajeev Sreenivasan, Member, National Think Tank on Intellectual Property Rights, Government of India*

*Dr Josukutty C A, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram*

*Dr Stanly Johnny, International Affairs Editor, The Hindu, Chennai*

*Dr Uma Purushothaman, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations & Politics, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod*

*Vinson Palathingal, Executive Director, Indo-American Center, Washington DC*

## Summary of the International Conference on U.S. Presidential Election 2016

- ✚ The U.S. system follows a Presidential democracy, where the Head of the Government is the Head of the State, and the President is elected for a fixed tenure of four years.
- ✚ The Presidential Election process takes place into two phases. First, there is voting for Presidential nomination in Primaries and Caucuses. This takes place on different days across the States in the country. Second, there is the General Election that takes place on the Election Day in November. As the world's oldest democracy goes to polls, it chooses the 435 members of the House of Representatives and one-third members of the Senate, the two houses of the Congress.
- ✚ The citizens cannot directly elect the President and are represented through electors, who represent their respective States in the Electoral College and vote for their choice of the President and Vice President. Each State has a number of electoral votes equal to its representation in the two houses of the Congress. The Electoral College comprising of 538 elected representatives - 435 members from the 50 Congressional districts, 100 Senators and three electors from the District of Columbia - casts votes to elect the President and Vice President. The candidate who secures the majority (270 or more) becomes the President. Thus, the process qualifies itself as an indirect election.
- ✚ The U.S. Presidential system is considered one of the best models of the system. This is on account of a powerful Senate exercising checks and balances on the President, as Senate approval is mandatory for policy decisions. In a similar vein, the President could veto any act of the Congress. The Constitution mandates a two-third vote of both the chambers to override the veto. Moreover, the rights of small States are ensured, as they are allowed two Senators each like large States.
- ✚ Simultaneously, one cannot disregard the dilemmas in the system. The candidate who wins the most number of votes from a State (not the majority) gets the entire electoral votes from that State, with the minority going under represented. This makes the candidates focus on Swing States than on States where they could win or lose by a huge margin. Swing voters are those who do not identify strongly with either of the parties, meaning those who did not vote for the same party in the last two elections. Owing to the unpopularity of both the candidates and the prevalence of widespread

disgruntlement amongst the masses, the 2016 election outcome weighs heavily on swing votes. For the same reason, third parties like the Libertarian Party and Green Party are also expected to fare better this year, though a Presidential victory is unlikely.

- ✚ The 2016 Presidential Election is critical on account of the polarised nature of the campaign between the two major Presidential candidates, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Donald Trump. The fact that the US remains a superpower attracts wide global coverage of the electioneering process. The 2016 election is a closely contested one, as both Democrats and Republicans will try to secure a Congressional majority alongside Presidential victory. Presently, the Republicans hold a majority in the Congress with 246 members in the House of Representatives and 54 in the Senate.
- ✚ Though the 2016 Presidential debates have touched upon a wide spectrum of issues, Americans will be more concerned with domestic policy issues like inflation, health care and social security than human rights or foreign policy issues.

## U.S. Presidential Election 2016: Key Issues & Themes

- ✚ Class and race identities ruled the roost in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election campaign. In the realm of foreign policy, defence and security, the perception of the US as a fortress protected by oceans is dead amongst the masses.
- ✚ The U.S. standing in the world has diminished from what it enjoyed in the previously uni-polar world. Discontent in the domestic economy with increased inequality, stagnant wages and widespread poverty (about 15 per cent) will make this election a closely contested one. Yet economic indicators were better off under Obama's term and over 70-75 per cent of the poll promises were fulfilled in the previous Presidencies. One can but wait to see if the proposed economic policies of Donald Trump have had any resonance with the masses.
- ✚ The wide appeal of anti-establishment candidates such as Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders and the popular resentment towards Hillary Clinton revealed the disgruntled mood of the American masses. The popular candidates questioned traditional values like free trade, embracing diversity and the idea of 'exporting freedom' that the US holds dearly to itself.

- ✚ There is an open revolt within the major parties on established areas. Republicans who promoted free trade have a candidate riding on nationalistic fervour, calling for more protectionism and is in an uneasy coalition with businesses and social conservatives. Democrats who were perceived as pro middle class seem to be championing the cause of big businesses. This dilemma has reinvigorated the Libertarian (polling at 8 per cent) and Green (polling at 1 per cent) parties in the U.S.
- ✚ The 2016 campaign was noted for being the ugliest campaign ever with the major candidates involved in a volley of personal slander against each other and little substance on divergent domestic and international issues. The American hegemony over global affairs is being questioned with the emergence of a multi-polar world with the growth of countries like China. There is a need for the US to change its foreign policy direction significantly due to the emergence of multilateralism in global politics, and the process has already begun. The 2016 Presidential Election qualifies as the one with the potential to redefine the U.S. foreign policy.
- ✚ Lack of awareness of global issues among the ordinary citizens makes them approve the American involvement in the domestic affairs of other nations. Yet, approach towards countries like Syria, Palestine, Sudan, Africa, Israel, Pakistan, Russia and India and issues on containing international terrorism had a prominent role in the campaign.
- ✚ The role of personality in administration is crucial, and presently, the election is too hypothetical to make any kind of prediction. Amidst this backdrop, the vagueness in Donald Trump's personality and clarity in Hillary Clinton's temperaments, attitude and personality make the future of the U.S. linked to the U.S. Presidential Election outcome.
- ✚ Though poll turnout in the U.S. is generally low, it does not mean that Americans are less politically aware. The dissatisfaction of the citizens with the Presidential candidates was revealed in many a poll conducted in the country. But the likelihood of such politically independent masses voting is also equally doubtful.
- ✚ The ignorance and negligence concerning terror strikes in Benghazi will prove to be a bane for Clinton. Obama Care proved bad for small businesses and Clinton is expected to continue with Obama's flagship policy.

- ✚ The recent rise in Clinton's popularity is on account of the Republican candidate's demeaning actions. The assumption that the unpopularity of the candidates may not be a decisive factor in determining the electoral outcomes could be busted.

## Appraisal of U.S. Foreign Policy under Barack Obama

- ✚ In the matter of U.S. foreign policy, one needs to re-think if Obama's foreign policy was radically different from that of his predecessor. Obama seems to have had a balance between multilateral intervention and unilateral intervention, wherever possible.
- ✚ In the Middle East, Obama has tried to balance between his interests and alliances. From being the only administration that stood behind Israel in all its strategic decisions, to brokering a diplomatic solution to the nuclear deal in Iran, in view of its heightened regional stature. From having arrived at a consensus within the administration on not going to war in Iran based on the Iraq fiasco, to the stoic approval of Saudi offensive against Yemen, Obama was an ideological liberal with conservative temperaments.
- ✚ The legacy of Obama's foreign policy faces many challenges, despite the positive developments in the relationship with Iran and Cuba and building consensus to ratify the 2015 Paris climate deal. These include the failure to control terror outfits, a failed approach towards North Korea and a nuclear-free world, uncertainties over Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), keeping Russia-China partnership in check and securing the trust of Trans-Atlantic allies. The ongoing stalemate in Syria, Brexit and worsening Ukrainian crisis will prove to be contentious issues for the next U.S. President.

## U.S. Presidential Election: Indian Prospects

- ✚ Indo-U.S. relation has been a roller coaster ride. Even though it may seem to be on an upswing, one cannot be sure if the relation is on a permanent footing. Changes vis-à-vis India cannot be expected from the next President. Though it is perceived that Republican Presidents are good for India, the trend has been changing since the time of Bill Clinton's administration that laid the groundwork for the nuclear agreement, which was brought to a logical conclusion by George W Bush.

- ✚ India and the U.S. have upgraded cooperation in the defence front. Experts opine that economic prosperity and military strategic security need to work in unison to scale up the relationship. They also voice that India's indigenous efforts like 'Make In India' must not be at the cost of excluding imports to India.
- ✚ Republican candidate Donald Trump aligns more with India in terms of being pro-business and containing terrorism. Hillary Clinton's acquaintances with Pakistan, on account of her history of lobbying for Pakistan, will be problematic for Indo-American interests.
- ✚ Tax hike will hit small businesses as opposed to Trump, whose business acumen will help avoid bureaucratic mess and red tapes, and improve investments and reduce taxes. Trump's calls for increased tariffs against economies that take advantage of the loopholes in the U.S. policies gel with the sentiments of the middle class and his pro police stance will help the law and order situation of the country. Indian entrepreneurs ought to undergo cultural adjustment to achieve potential in the U.S.