

## US Elections Enter Final Stretch: RSTV- Big Picture

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**What's in the news?**

- The United States is all set for the upcoming presidential elections due in November, 2020.
- This comes in the wake of the ongoing [coronavirus](#) pandemic.
- The elections are a direct contest between sitting US President and Republican nominee Donald Trump and Democratic nominee Joe Biden, who was vice-president during the Barack Obama presidency.
- President Trump suggested delaying the election on account of the Covid-19 pandemic, expressing apprehension that counting of mailed ballots could take longer and hamper the results, leading to a compromised poll. The suggestion, however, was criticized by the opposition Democratic Party.
- Biden's supporters have announced a launch of outreach in 14 languages to influence the Indian-American community.

**The ground situation during the final stretch of the election campaign:**

- Due to the COVID-19 crisis and the dwindling economy, President Trump has been giving priority to the foreign policy agenda. He has made China – the central focus in the final phase of the campaign.
- His agenda against China has found mass support from people across the country due to the distrust and disdain that the American public has been showing towards China because of the pandemic.
- Joe Biden's party is being viewed as being relatively weaker on the national security agenda, because they do not maintain strong anti-China rhetoric.
  - There have been speculations about Joe Biden's son Hunter Biden's alleged involvement in business dealings in China and with Ukrainian company Burisma Holdings Ltd.
- The violent protests in the US (The Minneapolis Uprising and George Floyd protests) have been politicized by both parties the, Democrats and Republicans to their favour.
- The pandemic situation has changed the nature of campaigning that used to happen traditionally.
- The democratic national convention and the Republican national convention have not only been delayed but also downsized due to the social distancing norms being followed.
- A number of protocols have been put in place for participants attending the events including self-quarantining, wearing protective gear, and COVID testing.
- The campaign is, however, expected to gain more momentum once the presidential debates begin and the candidates begin touring the constituencies.

### **What are key factors that are likely to influence the polls?**

- President Trump has been blamed by the democrats for mishandling the coronavirus situation right from the time of initial break out. There are nearly 4.8 million COVID cases in the US currently and there have been close to one lakh sixty thousand deaths.
- The US economy is in bad shape.
- Donald Trump and Joe Biden are trying to appeal to different sections of the electorate through different strategies.
  - Trump has promised to cut taxes.
  - Biden has offered a 3 trillion dollar package and to raise the minimum wage level.

### **Economic conditions in the US and its impact on the electorate:**

- The pandemic has had an irreversible impact on the US economy-
  - The decline in the US gross domestic product in the second quarter is about 33%.
  - The unemployment rate is nearly 11%.
  - The hike provided in unemployment benefits has expired.
- Forecasts predict that more people could die of mental disorders such as depression or commit suicide because of financial and economic losses than due to Covid-19 itself.

### **The 'black lives matter' movement and its impact on the elections:**

- Three strands emerged out of the crisis which followed George Floyd's death in Minneapolis-
  - Defunding the police became a topic of debate between the political groups and people at large.
  - The law and order crisis worsened in Portland after President Trump ordered the deployment of federal law enforcement forces there.
- A good turnover of black voters in the elections could turn out to be in the favour of Biden, who is also planning to select a woman running mate in the election.

### **Strained relations between the US and China-**

- Both Trump and Biden have taken a harsh stance on China, as there is general anger in people that China has taken away jobs from the local US population.
- President Trump has asked TikTok to find a US buyer, failing which the app will have to shut down its operations in the US.
- Earlier Biden was in the favor of a comprehensive dialogue with China. Now his position seems to be changing, as he is beginning to take a tougher position with regards to human rights violations in China and is supporting Taiwan.
- Biden has accused Chinese communist party of inhumane treatment, in restricting almost 3 million Uighurs, in concentration camp-like facilities.
- President Trump has praised India for taking a tough stand against China on trade as well as the geopolitical front.

## What do the elections mean to the Indian Americans?

- At just four million, Indian Americans make up for a small percentage of voting or electoral group.
  - However, they have a sizable presence in some of the biggest states of the United States like California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Georgia.
  - These are some of the biggest states in terms of the number of delegates they have for the Electoral College.
- How the Indian American voters vote in the swing states (or battleground states) is decisive for the election result.
- The voice of Indian Americans is important due to their capacity to support the candidates financially.
- Despite the pro-Democrat attitude of Indian Americans in the past, the Democratic party's criticism of the Indian Government on issues like abrogation of article 370 and the CAA bill, has angered the Indian community.
- The relationship of President Trump with the Indian PM is cordial. Despite this Trump has taken certain harsh decisions affecting India like:
  - Suspension of H1B visas.
  - Tariffs on aluminium and steel products.
  - Removing India from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) preferred list.

## What is a swing state?

- In the US, a state where the two major political parties have similar levels of support among voters is viewed as important in determining the overall result of a presidential election
- Such states are usually targeted by both major-party campaigns during the elections.

## Concluding remarks:

- It is largely opined that Indian-American community would play key role in battleground states.
- The consequences of the 2020 presidential elections for India will be less clear-cut. Of these, US policy on China will be by far the most consequential.
- The largest democracy and the oldest democracy of the world should cooperate with one another on several fronts for mutual benefits.