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Dr. Manoranjan Sharma
(Chief Economist)

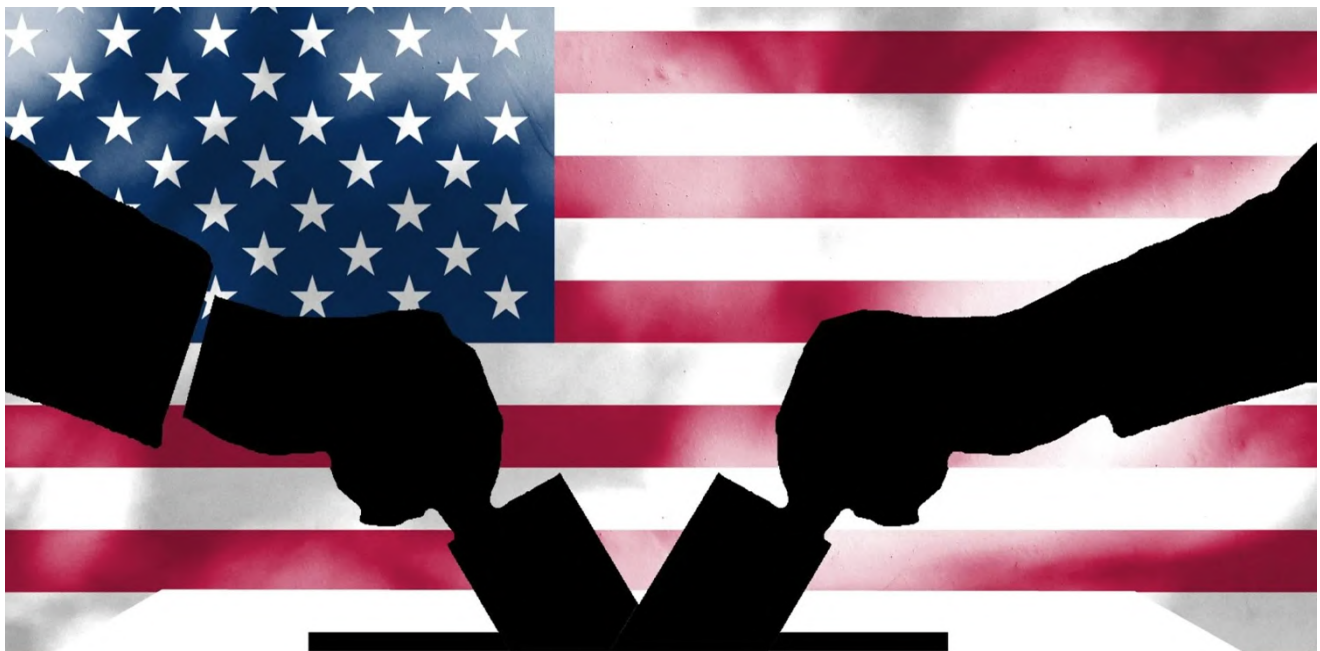
AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION- AN EXAMINATION

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Dr. Brajesh C. Choudhary, Senior Professor of Physics at Delhi University, has worked at FermiLab and CALTECH, USA, for about twenty years.

Most pollsters and election watchers had forecasted a close Presidential tussle between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris holding that it was “*too close to call*” and some even terming the bitterly fought election as “*a dead heat*”. We, however, did not hedge our bets and unequivocally maintained that “*aab ki baar Trump sarkar*”, i.e., Donald Trump is likely to win. These views about the certainty of Trump’s victory were shared with a large section of the Indian Press in the evening of November 5, 2024, at a time when the elections were still on in the USA and were prominently featured in several leading publications.

Hence this is not a case of looking at things in hindsight or being wiser after the event. Accordingly, there was no surprise there, not for us anyway.



Now that the US electoral process is done and dusted and former president Donald Trump has been elected the 47th president of the United States toppling Vice President Kamala Harris, let us not be swayed by whimsical considerations, particularly in view of the scope of her defeat. Trump's victory over been elected the 47th president of the United States toppling Vice President Kamala Harris Vice President Kamala Harris made him the first former President to return to power in non-consecutive terms since Grover Cleveland regained became the US President once again in the 1892 election. Let us look at Trump's smashing victory dispassionately in an objective manner. Why did Kamala Harris lose not just swing states but also blue states long held to be Democratic strongholds? As William Shakespeare wrote powerfully in his play Hamlet, "*Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*".

This result was a culmination of a historically tempestuous and bitterly fought election marked by two assassination attempts targeting Trump and a shift to a new Democratic nominee just a month before the party's convention. But Trump took assassination attempts, criminal convictions and a change in political opponent all in his stride and roundly trounced Kamala Harris. At the outset, let us say that Kamala Harris started with a distinct disadvantage, a kind of "*original sin*" in the sense, as poignantly pointed out by David Axelrod, the master strategist behind both of Barack Obama's Presidential wins, "*No incumbent party has ever won with a president with a 40% approval rating or under*". Axelrod also went on to say "*No party has won with people's attitudes about the economy what they were.*" Hence the Harris campaign always ran uphill.

Perceptions differ and assessments vary but she had it coming. Let us attempt to identify and isolate some of the basic reasons for her clear loss. An election is seldom won or lost on a solitary issue but the forces and factors of economy, immigration and, incumbency, individually and collectively, led to the vanquishing of Kamala Harris. And the rest is history.

First, economy - the significance of the economy at the hustings can never be underestimated. The state of the economy remains the cardinal principle in a deterministic electoral strategy in most parts of the world. The overriding significance of the economy is evocatively captured in Democratic strategist James Carville's colorful Yankee phrase "*The economy, stupid!*" in explaining Bill Clinton's win in 1992.

With the US undergoing a difficult time during the last four years of the Democratic rule, there were widespread concerns on multiple fronts and some well-informed individuals and institutions had even brought into focus the dreaded specter of "*stagflation*" about two years back. Things have improved since then but persons at the "*bottom of the pyramid*" continue to face a harrowing time because of the ravages of surging food prices and the inflationary spiral, particularly elevated grocery and gas prices, which devastated the poor, marginalized and deprived sections of the

population. With increased prices, the bottom half of the American population faced a housing crunch, which soured the American dream of having their own home.

Second, open porous borders - most honest Americans hated unchecked illegal immigration. While most parts of Europe and the USA accept and even welcome need-based legal immigration, unchecked illegal immigration is unacceptable. A major poll plank of Donald Trump was to set in motion the largest mass-deportation program in the nation's history, a supercharged version of a racist Eisenhower-era program called "*Operation Wetback*." Biden and Harris soft-pedaled this contextually significant issue and glossed over the crossing of the southern border by several millions with a debilitating impact on the infrastructure, opportunities for gainful employment, and the law and order situation.

Third, woke culture and its celebration - identity politics in the US and its educational institutions, especially after the attack on Israel by Islamists, alienated a large section of patriotic Americans. Trump lashed at Democrats as excessively "*woke*" and out of touch, and said the election represented a "*massive victory for democracy and for freedom*." "*The people who voted for us, they came from all quarters — union, non-union, African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Arab American, Muslim American,*" Trump said. "*We had everybody, and it was beautiful. It was a historic realignment, uniting citizens of all backgrounds around a common core of common sense.*"

Fourth, Kamala Harris was one of the most unsuitable candidates - Biden's decision to run for President led to the Democrats losing the Presidency. He is mentally and physically infirm now. No one knows who has been practically running the country for the last several months. Kamala was never taken seriously during his term. Had Democrats gone in for the primary without Biden, she would have stood no chance, so she was neither the most competent nor the most suitable person amongst the pool of possible Democratic nominees. The Democrats shot themselves in the foot by this ill-considered decision. She was also considered by people as basically a candidate of the Clintons, Obamas, and the elite of the Democratic Party. Hence extensive doubts about her electability and experience caused the fence-sitters to naturally gravitate towards Trump in the choice of their manifest destiny in the 21st century.

Fifth, Foreign policy—Trump's undivided focus on "*America first*" was seen as logical and contextually relevant. What made it more important is that Trump was the only President in recent history not to start a war. Biden's support for Ukraine was seen by many Americans as illogical and far removed from the grim realities of present-day America.

Sixth, Muslim vote in Michigan - Kamala and Democrats needed the Muslim votes in Michigan to win the state. But her support to Biden's Israel policy alienated the Muslim and Arab voters in a big way. Even though they were not overtly for Trump, they didn't vote for Kamala either. Hence not unsurprisingly Kamala lost Michigan.

Seventh, Mistake by Kamala in choosing the VP candidate - Her VP running mate may have been sold as great by the media, but his utterances and articulation on important national and international issues lacked punch and failed to carry most Americans with him. Had she taken on board the Governor of Pennsylvania as her running mate, she might have won Pennsylvania though she may still have lost the Presidency.

In this overarching scenario, the Americans went in for a tried and tested person - a person, who was their President for 4 years. Her ambiguous or inconsistent policy and platform evoked severe criticisms, eroding her credibility with voters. The Americans saw through Kamala's game of being second in command of the Biden administration but disassociating herself from the failures of the Biden administration. You cannot enjoy the spoils and riches of the office but refuse to take any blame for the decisions gone wrong- you cannot eat your cake and have it too! She was widely seen as a person who had no views or convictions of her own. Her grossly inadequate personal connection with voters and absence of emotional resonance worsened matters.

Thus, it clearly emerges that we should desist from any hasty generalizations about America having made a wrong choice. More specifically, Americans are neither racist nor sexist any more than they were four years ago. They just went for a safe bet and it is improper to underestimate the wisdom and sagacity of the electorate in the dynamics of change. Good luck to them.

Note: This is a slightly modified and detailed version of the article earlier published in *Financial Express* on November 18, 2024