YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAM

A DISAPPOINTING DEBATE IN HISTORY AS AMERICANS SAID NEITHER BIDEN NOR TRUMP WON THE 1ST DEBATE AT CNN.

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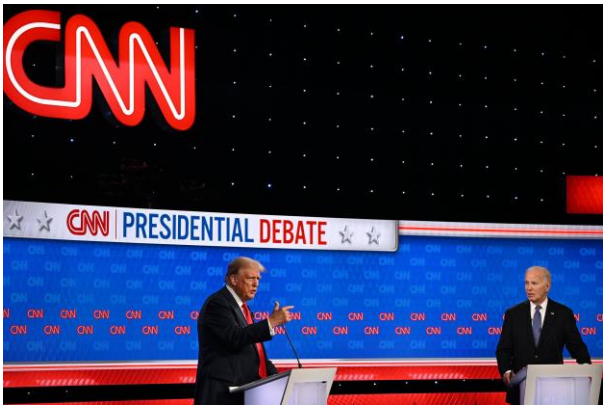

Photo: Presidential Candidates during the First Debate. Source: CNN Media.

On July 27, CNN in Atlanta hosted the first presidential debate, during which candidates Trump and Biden had the opportunity to express where they stand on pressing issues and promote their policies for addressing those national and international issues. The questions covered a variety of critical topics, such as economics, immigration, border control, and foreign policy, reflecting the concerns of a nation that sees the US as the most powerful country in the world. Despite the weighty content and challenges posed by the questions, the public perceived this inaugural presidential debate as the most disappointing leadership debate in American history. So, do American voters have enough evidence from this debate to evaluate their options on who they are going to vote for, and has that leader done enough to win over the citizens?

Economic Policy

The debate commenced with both candidates directing their statements towards economic policy. Trump asserted that his administration had presided over the strongest pre-COVID economy in the US history, attributing economic resilience during the pandemic to tax cuts and deregulation. He argued that tariffs on Chinese goods were intended to reduce the trade deficit and bolster domestic employment, although these measures did not substantially alter trade dynamics or achieve their intended benefits for the US economy. Trump's claims indicated that while tax cuts stimulated economic growth, their primary beneficiaries were corporations and high-income earners. The effectiveness of his COVID-19 response remains a topic of debate, with criticisms focusing on delays in initial testing and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE).

In contrast, Biden criticized Trump's economic policies as favoring the wealthy and exacerbating income inequality, linking the growing deficit to tax cuts and deregulation. The Biden Administration inherited the US economy damaged by the pandemic, prompting efforts to stimulate job recovery and ensure economic stability. He also highlighted negotiations with Samsung to establish additional manufacturing plants in the US, with the aim of creating job opportunities for Americans during and after the pandemic, despite the challenging responsibilities that Trump had left behind. Despite the fact that the inflation rate was higher during the Biden administration, the GPD increased by 8.4%, and the economy added more than 15 million jobs under Biden, which was better than when Trump left.

Immigration Policy and Border Control

President Biden highlighted his administration's efforts to forge bipartisan agreements and bolster resources aimed at border management and reducing illegal crossings. He emphasized the reinforcement of border police and asylum officers while condemning Trump-era policies that led to family separations.

Various sources have reported that Biden's border restriction policy has resulted in a notable 40% decrease in illegal crossings during his tenure, which was a true statement that he claimed in the debate. In responding to illegal immigrants, Biden has also announced a large-scale immigration program to offer legal status to half a million unauthorized immigrants who married American citizens as a legal pathway to the US, which aims to foster stricter legal regulations and lower the number of illegal immigrants.

Meanwhile, President Trump portrayed Biden's policies as responsible for an insecure border, alleging that they facilitated the entry of criminals, including terrorists, into the country. Prior to this debate, Trump also announced an extension of executive policy aimed at granting green cards to foreign graduates from US colleges, although he did mention this during the debate. Instead of using this policy proposal as an opportunity to rebut Biden's, Trump carelessly focused on attacking Biden with an issue related to terrorism. However, Trump's strong argument implied dissatisfaction with Biden's border security management, as evidenced by the Border Patrol's endorsement. However, experts disputed Trump's claims of increased criminal and terrorist entries, citing a lack of specific evidence. Furthermore, this debate lacks independent verification of the Border Patrol's endorsement claim.

Regarding deportation and broader immigration policies, Trump reiterated his commitment to conducting substantial deportation operations. He criticized Biden for not addressing undocumented immigrants already in the country, including those with established ties and family connections. However, Trump did not outline specific deportation plans during the debate, leaving uncertainties about the feasibility and scope of such operations. Biden's approach to deportation and immigrant integration faced scrutiny, underscoring the importance of fact-checking specific claims made by both candidates concerning their immigration policies.

Foreign Policy

Regarding foreign policy, there were some critical issues that were discussed, especially diplomacy, trade relations, and international conflicts. Biden emphasized a shift towards diplomacy and reduced military engagements compared to Trump's tenure, particularly noting the withdrawal from Afghanistan. He criticized Trump's foreign policy for undermining US credibility and global alliances. Additionally, Biden focuses more on imposing strong diplomacy first by going on diplomatic trips and negotiating with powerful nations, such as a trip to China to strengthen international relations.

On the other hand, Trump made it clear during his presidency where he stands with China by imposing an executive order that prohibits US companies from doing business with Huawei due to national security concerns regarding trade relations with China. Trump’s focus on tarrifs contrasted with Biden’s critique of Trump’s economic legacy and approach to global affairs, underscoring the complexities and implications of their economic policies and international strategies.

Former President Trump addressed the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, now in its third year. He disputed Putin's assertion that ending the war depends on Russia retaining its claimed Ukrainian territory and Ukraine abandoning its NATO aspirations. Trump asserted that respecting Putin would have prevented Russia’s invasion by any president. He argued that if Biden had taken no action to halt the war, Trump himself would have fired the generals responsible for Afghanistan's debacle—the loss of billions in equipment and the abandonment of American citizens. Trump also contended that Biden led the war effort, providing $200 billion to Ukraine unnecessarily. Furthermore, Trump has pledged to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine before taking office as president-elect on January 20th.

Conversely, Biden also criticized Putin for causing thousands of deaths and attempting to restore Soviet-era territories. He also rebutted Trump’s accusation that the only support he provided to Ukraine was weapons, not money. Furthermore, Biden warned that if Putin persists, the US will continue to use its financial aid and weapons production to support Ukraine, while other NATO allies also produce and support as much as the US.

When asked about supporting the creation of an independent Palestinian state for regional peace, Trump did not state whether he agreed or disagreed with the statement; instead, he said, “I’ll have to see." Trump claimed that he pressured NATO on financial commitments to put hundreds of billions of dollars toward Ukraine during a confidential meeting to deter Russia, but this was a false statement as there was no such confidential meeting as well as the US spending 100% on NATO.

In October 2023, Hamas attacked Israel, resulting in over a thousand deaths and hundreds of hostages. Israel's response caused thousands of Palestinian casualties and created a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. President Biden proposed a three-stage plan to end the conflict: trading hostages for a ceasefire, imposing additional conditions for a ceasefire, and ultimately ending the war. Biden asserted that only Hamas desires the conflict's continuation, and the US is actively urging them to accept peace. The US, the world's foremost supporter of Israel, promptly provided Israel with the necessary weapons and dispatched experts and intelligence personnel to aid in Hamas's eradication.

Biden believes in the strength of alliances, having convinced European nations to pledge financial support to prevent a major European war like Russia's invasion. He also claimed that he got the other 50 nations to support Ukraine, including Japan and South Korea, because they recognized the severe threat to global peace posed by the conflict, and history has already proven that no major war in Europe has ever been able to be contained just in Europe. Conversely, Trump stated during the debate that he does not want to support NATO if the European countries do not pay and refuse to guard them against Russia.

Summary

Based on real-time analysis and contextual feedback from panelists, the general public, and governors' responses on social media, neither candidate emerged as a clear winner in the debate. Critics expressed concerns about Biden's health and noted Trump's lack of factual support for his statements. Biden demonstrated a more intellectual approach, articulating his responses with statistics, examples, and case studies to bolster his administration's policies for reelection. However, his explanations sometimes lacked sufficient context to fully resonate with the audience.

Trump, however, emphasized his achievements during his presidency, asserting that they strengthened the nation. However, he frequently sidestepped questions and focused heavily on attacking Biden, particularly on his physical fitness to serve another term. Despite Biden's effective points regarding his reelection plans, Trump's aggressive stance and projection of physical vigor may have resonated more with public opinion, portraying him as a strong national leader intent on restoring America's greatness.

The debate underscored significant policy differences between the candidates, particularly on issues like abortion, the economy, immigration, and foreign policy. Each presented their administration's actions and intentions through contrasting lenses of effectiveness and accountability. However, amidst these assertions, the importance of fact-checking remains paramount to clarifying the accuracy and implications of the claims made during this critical exchange. As a result, this debate left the entire nation questioning the potential of their choices, as no one made any cutting-edge points during the debate to capture attention. Instead, they viewed each other's arguments as utterly unethical. Furthermore, not only did Americans watch the presidential debate, but the entire world did as well.

What Is Next?

Regarding the debate rules, certain elements of the rules led to unreliable statements by both candidates. The rules primarily prohibit the use of pre-written notes, props, or contact with campaign staff. Furthermore, there was inconsistent application of the one-minute response rule: President Trump frequently avoided direct answers, prompting multiple interventions from the moderator to provide additional opportunities to substantiate his points, whereas President Biden adhered consistently to the time constraints.

To restore voters' trust, both candidates must adopt more strategic approaches to answering questions, supported by concrete evidence and relevant information. Regarding policy proposals, both candidates often lacked comprehensive explanations of context, methods, actions, and projected outcomes necessary to persuade the audience. In particular, discussions on immigration and foreign policy tended to narrowly focus on personal accolades rather than substantive strategies. Instead, candidates should emphasize critical issues, evaluate the efficacy of past approaches, outline proposed methodologies, and demonstrate the capability to enforce policies effectively. Effective leadership demands the ability to communicate confidently and clearly, recognizing the importance of projecting firmness and accuracy when addressing the public.

Furthermore, clear and impactful dialogues in debates allow candidates to articulate their strategies in accessible language, ensuring clarity and comprehension among a diverse electorate. By addressing these aspects in the next debate, candidates can attract greater public attention and bolster their campaign efforts. Ultimately, the upcoming debate presents an opportunity for both candidates not only to address past shortcomings but also to reaffirm their years. Will people trust in Trump for another term to maintain peace within the nation and make America great again, or will they vote for Biden to retake the position despite his health concerns and possibly a replacement candidate? The next debate will provide all Americans with a final answer.

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