
Trump-Biden. Distance debate features two conceptions of Nation and two leadership styles

Two competing visions of America emerged in the second debate of the US election campaign. Last night President Donald Trump was scheduled to meet Joe Biden, and together they were to answer questions from the public, but the town halls - as the event is called - were held separately, after Trump refused to debate Biden virtually following his positive COVID-19 diagnosis. *The president spoke from Florida while Biden's town hall took place in Pennsylvania.* Trump's town hall was hosted by NBC news, and he was, at times, cornered by journalist Savannah Guthrie; whereas Biden aired on ABC for 1 and a half hours, elegantly pressed by journalist George Stephanopoulos. The audience of parents, African-Americans, employees, Democratic and Republican supporters, managers and immigrants asked the questions at safe distance, occasionally revealing their political orientation in the 2016 elections. There was no debate, except with the journalists moderators, no interruptions or invectives. What we saw were *two competing political visions, two conceptions of the Nation, two leadership styles, on two separate channels.* The themes were similar and recurrent for both: Covid-19, economy, labour, taxation, racial injustice, minorities, Supreme Court. The President's answers were marked by the recurring cliché that no one had done better than him and that everything was formidable, exceptional, great; Biden, on the other hand, refocused the debate on personal experiences, meetings, facts, even if they regarded his signing of the 1994 crime bill, his signature piece of legislation that led to the mass incarceration of African Americans, regretting it thereafter. The response to the coronavirus, masks and prevention measures, vaccines, were a common topic for much of the debate with divergent and inaccurate data, occasionally exaggerated by the US President. Biden appeared consistently restrained, reasonable, even when he voiced criticism of his opponent especially on the number of deaths and the delays in response to the pandemic. *A crucial question for both was the outcome of the election and the reaction to defeat.* Trump bluntly said he would accept them on the condition of "an honest election", on which he expanded mentioning stories of counterfeit ballots or tossed in the trash, to which the reporter replied that the FBI refuted it categorically, but for the president "the Federal Bureau is not doing a good job." Biden confirmed his acceptance and said he hoped to return to being a professor in Pennsylvania, where he was born. But when one voter asked how to bring Trump and his supporters to pursue the ideal of a united and better country, the Democratic candidate responded somewhat emotionally that "it's going to be hard. (The President) has not learned the lesson of what happened before." *With regard to economic recovery, Trump was contested over unemployment, which doubled despite his narrative as a creator of millions of jobs, while Biden had to gloss over the New Green Deal.* The democratic Left supported the radical shift to a green economy and included it in its agenda, although the former vice-president rejected the term and upheld moderate stances that do not exclude traditional forms of energy and industry. It should be said that Biden's economic plan, reviewed by Moody's Analytics, proved that the creation of wealth and jobs through a sustainable economy is not just a hypothesis, but consists of six-/seven-digit numbers in terms of work and income. Trump was credited by his adversary on the politics regarding Israel, but Biden pointed out that Trump's 'America First' policy has 'made America alone'. Trump almost forgot to criticize his opponent, despite his campaign having suggested the strategy of drawing comparisons; instead, the President wants to turn the elections into a referendum on his presidency, where lights and shadows are blurred. *One of the grey areas remains his relationship with white supremacist groups, which the US President condemned with mixed and conflicting messages,* further evidenced during last night's event. When asked if he knew QAnon, a group that upholds the idea that government elites run a satanic sect that harms children, he answered no, although he knew that "they oppose paedophilia, and I agree with that": a disguised endorsement that did not go unnoticed. The split-screen town halls pursued a targeted election campaign to win two swinging states like Florida and Pennsylvania that will be

instrumental in securing victory in the White House and administrating the country over the next four years. The next event will take place on October 22.

Maddalena Maltese