
The Biden era begins. Calvo-Quirós (sociologist): "We inherit a deeply splintered and divided nation"

(from New York) After 41 days of bitter and expensive lawsuits to contest the legitimacy of postal votes, ballot counts and States' election laws, the Electoral College elected Joe Biden the 46th President of the United States. The most inflamed electoral contest in the history of American democracy, blemished by a barrage of vicious accusations, venomous tweets, unprecedented attacks on the electoral system and the constitution, with the blessing and open support of President Trump, has come to a conclusion, finally ushering in a new -albeit difficult - season for the White House, for the Country and for the Republican Party. *"President Biden, and with him all the rest of us, inherit a deeply splintered and divided nation facing a multitude of challenges in terms of race, social class, gender, international relations. The Country is grappling with the human and economic impacts of COVID-19 that will continue to exist after the vaccine and long after whichever recovery plan has been put in place."* **William A. Calvo-Quirós**, sociologist and associate professor of American Culture and Ethnic Studies at the University of Michigan is certain that the US will continue to experience an enduring multifaceted crisis. **What must Joe Biden's agenda absolutely include?** The new President will be confronted with an occupational crisis whereby women's job losses are four times greater than men's. This devastating impact is bound to persist long after the vaccine. *At a later stage, Biden will have to redefine the notion of self and ego and our understanding of nationhood as a collective narrative. In the last 4 years we witnessed a dysfunction between Self and Ego. When Ego prevails we are confronted with someone who claims to be re-elected, wherein prevails the notion of masculinity at the expense of the community. Thus if Ego fails to recognize that by losing you are only doing the good of the nation, we are facing a big problem. This connotation of the collective self is the great challenge faced by the U.S. and the rest of the world, which equally affects public policies. If caring for others is paramount, then health care planning is shaped along these lines. But if my ego takes centre stage, I will not be willing to pay for others in need, for the poor or disabled, whom I see as taking advantage of this system.* **Is American democracy in crisis?** The underlying fear is that this system is collapsing and that, after the post-election legal challenges, democracy, Congress, the Executive, and the Supreme Court might be weaker, and that we could face a serious governability problem. For example, how can those who did not vote for this President be engaged in the national governance process? *In sociology the crisis of a system occurs when that system can no longer be reproduced, and in the case of institutions, the crisis occurs when they cease being effective for the people who they are supposed to represent.* Our democracy is in crisis, and I think it's a good thing, as we now realize that the victorious 51% rules over a defeated 49% of unhappy citizens who feel their interests are not being represented. This means that democracy as it is today must be reconsidered. Although it's certainly the best system experienced to date, there may be another type of governmental system capable of representing both that 51% and the 49% in a satisfactory manner, as was never previously considered. **Therefore, although Mr. Biden has announced a Democracy summit, is it no longer the best possible world?** The fact is that *institutions must learn to work with difference. If the majority and minority divide is wide, the minority group disappears or is absorbed.* This is the experience of our democracies. By contrast, when differences are very slight, we are caught up in a form of ambiguity. Trump voters are not going to disappear and Biden voters are not an overwhelming majority, so that 1% difference must lead us to be more engaged in dialogue, bridging the dividing line between the different groups. It's an uncharted, challenging, vulnerable territory, but there is no other way to deal with polarization, which is a global phenomenon, extending beyond US borders. *I am not worried about structures collapsing if they no longer serve the needs of the people. Rather, I would be concerned with educating people to inhabit this unchartered territory and devise something new.* **Which America is Biden and the rest of the world addressing?** All the data and polls that formed the portrait of the country turned

out to be wrong. We believed that the pandemic would somewhat shape the outcome of the vote, but we found that the States hardest hit by infections and deaths, for example, continued supporting the outgoing President even though some of his healthcare choices proved problematic. *All indicators show that we are failing to grasp the real picture of America.* Race, social status, fundamental parameters are now sidelined, and notions such as masculinity, otherwise deemed irrelevant, are now core elements. A politician who depicts himself as a superhero, a messiah, captures and channels emotions that are needed in times of crisis. I would never want such a President in normal times, yet the facts revealed a different story, such as the non-homogeneous nature of the Hispanic, Catholic, white, coastal and Midwestern vote. That' s the America that President Biden and the rest of us are inheriting and another mode of communication is needed. For example: if wearing a mask is seen as a means of self-protection, since the individual rules over the body, in the struggle to reaffirm individual authority and freedom of decision, people will refuse to wear it. When it was explained that it served to protect the other person, then this act of caring led people to be willing to lose some of their freedom. Here we see the notion of self again:

I care for myself as I relate to the community, versus an ego that ignores everyone else.

We need to learn how to speak to this America.

Maddalena Maltese