

Opinion

# US Elections: The Unasked Questions

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As millions of Americans prepare to go to the polls next Tuesday, joining the estimated 50 million who have already cast their ballots, they might take a few moments to ask themselves a simple question: What are we voting for?

Going by the narrative peddled by a good chunk of the US media the election is all about one man: President Donald J Trump.

This is all well and good; all elections at such levels include a dose of personal consideration of the candidates. Visiting several cities across the states in 2008 many voters told us that they were casting their ballots for Barack Obama because they thought it was time the US had a black president. The fact that he had no record to present didn't matter. In 2016 it was Trump's turn to benefit from his status as the outsider. In both cases, however, Obama and Trump appeared like blank slates on which voters could draw cherished expectations.

This time, however, both candidates, Trump and Joe Biden, are known candidates. Trump has had almost four years in which to make himself known as a political leader. For his part, Biden boasts a CV that covers almost half a

century of involvement with politics, albeit mostly on the sidelines as Senator and Vice President. That fact alone should have helped focus attention on the policy records of both men, offering the American voter a richer and deeper choice beyond personal sympathies and antipathies. Sadly, that didn't happen.

From the start this year's presidential campaign was transformed into a shouting match that owed nothing to the jeerings of fishwives in the old Covent Garden. The hope some of us had was for the campaign to be propelled into some higher ground through the presidential debates where, we wrongly expected, the two men would expose and compare their respective policies. As you know, that didn't happen. One debate was reduced to a punch and judy show in bad taste. Another debate was wasted on an exchange of inanities about Covid-19, something about which neither candidate, like the rest of us knows anything useful.

While Trump is a known quantity, albeit often unpredicted in his own idiosyncratic way, Biden, who may well win the presidency, cannot be pinned down on key issues, notably on economy and foreign policy. For the first time in an American presidential election the challenger was unable or unwilling to offer clear alternatives to the incumbent's signature policies.

Thus one could not rule out the possibility, abhorrent to many anti-Trumpists, that a President Biden might not undo some of Trump's signature economic and foreign policy choices.

The initial success of Trump's economic policy was based on three factors: a substantial tax cut, energy independence more level playing field in foreign trade. It is not all clear what Biden would do in those fields. Will he come out with a

high tax scenario at a time the economy is grappling with the crippling effect of Covid-19? Will he stop or curtail fracking and lose the status of number one global energy producer that the US has won for the first time since the 1960s? Will he undo the new trade deals reached with Canada, Mexico and the European Union that tipped the balance, albeit gingerly, in favor of the US?

As far as foreign policy is concerned the whole topic was dropped from the debates' agenda, perhaps because Trump has a rather successful record. Thus, many questions remain. For example

will Biden simply re-join the so-called Paris Accord on climate change even though none of the remaining signatories has complied with it?

Will Biden simply apologize and resume signing cheques for UNESCO and the World Health Organization (WHO) without insisting on reforms that most member nations regard as urgently needed?

On NATO, will Biden rollback the Trump footage and allow member states to reduce defense expenditure leaving the US to shoulder more of the burden of common security? Will Biden dismantle the build-up of troops and materiel that has bolstered the allies in Central and Eastern Europe?

On strategic arms limitation schemes, will Biden abandon Trump's demand to expand any agreement to include China or will he insist on a Cold War style cheek with Vladimir Putin? Will Biden give the two fingers to Jair Bolsonaro and Narendra Modi, instead, hug Nicolas Maduro as Obama did with Hugo Chavez and Raul Castro?

And what about fixing some red lines to curb China's hubris translated into aggressive behavior across the globe? Would Biden stop calling for greater accountability by China with regard to the Covid-19 catastrophe. Biden has been running with Covid-19 while Trump in his gauche way has tried to run against it.

On the Middle East, will Biden simply revive the Obama "nuke deal" with the Islamic Republic in Iran, lift sanctions and help the mullahs feed the monsters they have created across the globe in the

name of exporting revolution? Will he resume smuggling crisp greenbacks to Tehran to help "the moderate faction" smile more tooth-fully while "the radical faction" massacres Iranian protesters in the streets?

Will Biden bring back the US Embassy from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv and call Senator George Mitchel to resume the one-year mission Obama gave him in 2008 to create a Palestinian state? Will a President Biden pressure the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan to renege on their normalization accord with Israel and re-join the Rejection Front?

Will President Biden stab the long-term allies of the US in the back in the hope of turning deadly foes into friends as Obama tried to do with his infamous speech at Cairo University?

What about Trump's ambitious though problematic plan to wind down US military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq, thus closing the 30-year long chapter of war with a sustainable peace? Will Biden revert to Obama's policy of talking peace but waging war or will he, as his ally Bernie Sanders demands, simply cut and run?

And has Biden of 2020 abandoned the obsession that the Biden of 2008 had with carving Iraq into three or four mini-states?

All this may sound irrelevant to many, including some media colleagues intoxicated by the hatred of Trump. But they would be wise to take a moment and ponder that: maybe whatever Trump did wasn't all bad. Just, maybe. Think about it!