

I want you to close your eyes and imagine this: two old men, yelling and interrupting one another. Got it? Now add in a third old guy – this one trying to reign in the other two. See it? Perfect. What you’ve just pictured was the first presidential debate of the year.

President Donald J. Trump and former Vice-President Joe Biden duked it out in a chaotic, freewheeling first debate. Moderator Chris Wallace of Fox News had his hands full, as the debate was marred by interruptions, outbursts, and shaky responses. The United States continues to grapple with COVID-19, racial tension, and climate change, yet any plans for a better future were lost in the hubbub of the debate.

Wallace chose six topics to cover during the 90 minute deliberation, but both candidates often steered away from Wallace’s questions. The result? A mishmash of claims, plans, and tangents. Here are the key moments:

- The U.S. recently surpassed 200,000 deaths due to COVID-19, so Biden was quick to accuse Trump of having “no plan” in place and named him the cause of thousands of preventable deaths. Trump’s response included blaming China for the virus, railing on the “fake news” for painting a negative picture of him, and accusing Biden of “failing” with the swine flu. (To that last point, Biden quickly chided Trump, saying 14,000 swine flu deaths didn’t compare to the 200,000 lives Trump has lost on his watch.)
- President Trump insisted that a vaccine will be readily available, saying it was “weeks away.” He also elaborated on how the military was ready to distribute a vaccine, should one become available. Both Wallace and Biden pushed back, however, citing CDC director Robert Redfield and members of “Operation Warp Speed”, all of which have shared a vaccine may be discovered by the end of 2020, but likely won’t be readily available until mid-2021 at the earliest.

- The topic of climate change arose, and Biden was very clear about one thing: the Green New Deal is not his plan (to which Trump gleefully declared “[Biden] just lost the radical left”). Biden proceeded to outline how his administration would rejoin the Paris Climate Accord, build millions of energy-efficient homes, and create thousands of paying jobs through a new “Green Infrastructure.” When asked about how he’d pay for everything, he said “it will pay for itself as we move forward”, citing the increase of jobs created and implying less would be spent on helping natural-disaster-stricken areas.
- In arguably the most controversial moment of the night, Trump was asked by both Biden and Wallace to condemn white supremacists. When Biden asked Trump to denounce The Proud Boys, Trump replied “Proud Boys, stand back and stand by” before launching into a tirade about antifa and why they’re the extremists Americans need to be worried about. The president’s refusal to condemn white supremacist groups marked another missed opportunity for Trump to improve his image. Then again, condemning such groups could potentially anger a chunk of his base.

Talking points and interruptions aside, the debate ultimately was much of the same for both candidates. Trump was his usual, bullish self, and Biden continued to show his age by stumbling through sentences. Whether the debate changes polling numbers remains to be seen, but the American public can certainly hope the next debate has fewer than 128 interruptions.*

*number of times Trump interrupted (Biden had dozens of interruptions too) (from [Slate](#))