

Third Debate: As Trump blunders on accepting the election result, the contest is now Clinton's to lose.

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Last night saw the third and final presidential election debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. US Centre Director, [Peter Trubowitz](#) comments that while Clinton may have had a few weak moments, she came prepared and sounded presidential. By contrast, Trump's refusal to say that he would accept the election results were he to lose will do nothing to reassure voters who have been reluctant to get behind him.



1) Who won last night?

Hillary Clinton did. While Donald Trump probably had his best debate performance on the issues, I think his refusal to say if he will accept the election results – commenting “I’ll keep you in suspense” to moderator Chris Wallace – was a major blunder. That will be the lede in every news story in the US today and it is hard to see how it helps him convince those voters still on the fence to get behind him. Those voters have had misgivings about Trump’s temperament and maturity throughout the campaign and I don’t think they will be reassured by his refusal to say he will concede if he loses. Meanwhile, those voters who favour Clinton saw little reason last night to change their minds. She had a few weak moments, but she came prepared and looked and sounded presidential. She’s helped herself in all three debates. Donald Trump: not so much.

2) Do you think last night’s debate will have much impact on the campaign?

Probably not. Clinton is leading in all the national polls and she has the edge in most of the battleground states — states that are normally up for grabs in a presidential year. It’s hard to see how Trump’s performance last night changes that political dynamic in any fundamental way. If anything, I would expect Clinton to expand on her lead after last night’s performance. As we head into the final stage of the campaign, the election is hers to lose.

3) What should we be looking for from Clinton and Trump in the remaining 20 days of the campaign?

Clinton faces a choice: does she focus her efforts on the Democratic base to make sure they turn out on November 8 or reach out to disenchanted Republicans in hopes of generating a landslide akin to Lyndon Johnson’s 1964 victory against Barry Goldwater. She needs to guard against complacency and insure that voters will look back on the election result as a policy mandate — a vote for a clear policy direction. Reaching out to Republicans muddies the message: it becomes more about what she isn’t (i.e. Trump) than what she stands for and will do as president. In Trump’s case it’s anybody’s guess. His path to victory in the Electoral College is now very narrow and I think the question he needs to answer, if he hasn’t already, is what matters more: winning the presidency or building his brand? My sense is that he’s more focused on the latter.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor the London School of Economics.

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Peter Trubowitz is Professor and Head of International Relations, and Director of the LSE's US Centre. His main research interests are in the fields of international security and comparative foreign policy, with special focus on American grand strategy and foreign policy. He also writes and comments frequently on U.S. party politics and elections and how they shape and are shaped by America's changing place in the world.



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