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## The veep debate hardly moved the needle

Unlike the Donald Trump-Kamala debate, the one between the Vice Presidential candidates largely stuck to policy issues



Vance vs Walz. Policy push ▪ REUTERS

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In a Presidential election that is expected to go down to the wire, there was a glimmer of a hope that the debate on Tuesday evening between the Vice Presidential candidates Senator JD Vance of Ohio and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz could give some momentum to one of the campaigns.

But at the end of the 90-odd minutes, instant polling by two networks showed a virtual tie, although individually both Vance and Walz improved their scores. For all the bombast and high flying rhetoric witnessed at the Donald Trump-Kamala Harris first debate, it was a tone of civility for the most part.

In fact an argument is being made that Senator Vance projected a sober side of former President Trump and his perceived harsh policy alternatives, be it on immigration or abortion, two issues that will weigh heavily on the minds of voters as they head to the polls on November 5.

While the Harris campaign is trying to make the most out of the abortion battle, the Republican camp is trying to take some steam off the issue with Vance maintaining that it is best for the states to handle and Trump saying that women would not have to “worry” about abortion at all should he return to office.

Some of the interest in the Vance-Walz debate had to do with the fact that this was the last chance for the campaigns to put their views across as President Trump declined a second encounter with Harris after their September meet. But aside from occasional flubs and a brief fiery exchange on Haitian immigrants, it was basically all policy oriented that was in the open already.

## Tight race

Many national polls are still showing a very tight race with a slim advantage for Vice President Harris; and the story is the same in the seven battleground states that the candidates are repeatedly visiting knowing their critical role in the election. The 2-to-3 point lead that Vice President Harris is showing nationally is within the margin of error; and in the swing states, the race is too close to call especially in Michigan and Pennsylvania. And some polls show Trump getting into small leads in Arizona and Nevada.

Barely a month to go for the showdown, the Biden administration is facing an unprecedented crisis in West Asia that would most certainly drag the US in any expanded conflict. The Iranian missile barrage against Israel has left the US in a tight spot even as actors in the region and the major powers are anxiously waiting for the response from Tel Aviv. Even without an election season, Washington would have thrown its weight behind the Jewish state; and it is all the more crucial not to be seen as wavering in support especially as Iran has entered the fray in support of the Hezbollah in Lebanon.

In more ways than one, the crisis in West Asia is a distraction for Vice President Harris.

For one, former President Trump has been highly critical of Harris' foreign policy credentials; and for another, this is the time for the Vice President to show that she is an active participant in the decision-making, in the situation room and outside.

The political campaigns know well that foreign policy does not make or break American Presidential elections. But this is one of those rare occasions of Harris having to adjust her campaigning schedule even if it means cutting short trips to key areas.

Trump and his campaign keep hammering away at immigration, pointedly accusing the Biden administration — stressing that Harris is a part — of letting in people with a criminal

background who have gone on a rampage in America. Officials are cautioning against misreading the numbers but in the heat of the campaign, the advisory is falling on deaf ears.

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