

Last lap

Biden and Harris have to show they can lift the U.S. out of the virus-induced crisis

Former U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden has become the Democratic Party's official nominee for the 2020 presidential election after a glitz four-day extravaganza at the Democratic National Convention. Alongside his running mate Kamala Harris, he will seek to oust incumbent Donald Trump from the White House. If he does so, an array of remedial policy actions will be required from an early stage to lift the U.S. up from the economic destruction caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, he will need to urgently attend to a series of controversies and setbacks, some with international repercussions, that the Trump administration has become enmeshed in. Does Mr. Biden possess the political heft, personal charisma, and party mandate to do so? The party answered with a resounding 'yes' to all three questions at the Convention, which featured eloquent speeches by former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton and First Ladies Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton, as well as party heavyweights including Bernie Sanders, Nancy Pelosi, and Elizabeth Warren. While a few younger Democratic leaders were featured too, the Convention left little doubt that the old guard was still running the show, even if it was seeking to woo the next generation of voters within the framework of an altered political reality.

At the heart of that reality stands Mr. Trump, wobbling as he scores lower than Mr. Biden in the opinion polls, mostly for his bungling response to the pandemic, yet relentlessly throwing punches on mail-in voting and appealing to the 'silent majority' that Mr. Biden, if elected, would "hike taxes on Americans by \$4 trillion, eviscerate the Second Amendment, expand sanctuary cities, and end fossil fuels". To effectively counter these arguments, and avoid another debacle of the sort that Ms. Clinton faced in 2016, Mr. Biden and Ms. Harris need show only one thing – that they can save the U.S. economy and repair the country's standing with the rest of the world, especially by reclaiming a pivotal role in the multilateral governance of global public health, climate change and trade. Whether the Democrats, basking in the self-congratulatory afterglow of the Convention and reaffirming their commitment to liberal values, play their hand carefully through this endgame scenario, or whether the Trump vision of an inward-looking U.S. still carries the day, remains to be seen. What is clear is that the electoral outcome will be both a referendum expressing how much a broadly inclusive paradigm of the American Dream still resonates with the people, and a signal of the degree of openness that it will tolerate toward the peoples of other nations. Mr. Biden will have to bring his A-game to this final lap.